ALDSTADT, Harriet. Harry S Truman as an Advocate of Civil Rights: Politics or Compassion? (1971)
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When Franklin Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945, the United States was emerging from her most debilitating war and seemed intent on "getting back to normal" as quickly as possible. Harry Truman was thrust into the presidency at the death of one of the most revered men who ever led the country. The "accidental" president had no national following at the time of his accession to the office. Therefore, Truman appeared to be the least likely president to begin the campaign for civil rights for Negroes, and 1948 and the Democratic Party national convention the least likely time and place to take such a stand.

On the surface it seemed improbable that either party would sponsor dramatic reform programs. In the face of foreign events, it seemed more politic to fill the party's platform with platitudes about the free world and self-defense. Theoretically, a country turns away from internal problems in time of war and unites behind the leadership to win. Within this framework, it is logical to assume that once a war is over, all the internal problems erupt and demand attention. The year 1948 fits chronologically into this pattern, but the nation was still in the grip of war psychosis. The emergence of the tension between the Soviet Union and the United States produced almost the same demand for unity that a full-fledged

war summons, and Harry Truman was the proponent of an almost warlike attitude toward the Soviet Union. Yet he did not use the external threat to suppress internal reform. He supported the liberals within his party who wanted to recognize and ameliorate the problems of the American Negro.

This thesis attempts to delineate the various interpretations of Truman's actions. The first part of the paper is a brief outline of the gains the Negro made, or failed to make, under the New Deal. The bulk of the paper is concerned with the most common interpretation given to Truman's actions. Most of the history written on Truman reflects a disparaging attitude toward Truman's efforts to act on civil rights. More attention is paid to what he did not do than to what he did accomplish.[1] The general impression given is that he did not do as much for the Negro as did Roosevelt. This pro-Roosevent bias is most evident in "liberal" histories[2] which almost glorify Roosevelt, giving scant attention to the political compromises he had to make. The implication always lurks underneath the surface that Truman somehow does not measure up as a liberal when compared to Roosevelt.

This writer feels that Truman deserves better than a grudging admission that he did do "something" to help the Negro secure his rights. There is also a strong indication that the President acted out of something more than a regard

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[1]Barton Bernstein is an example of this.

[2]Eric Goldman and Herbert Feis are examples of "liberal" historians. Dr. M. S. Venkataramani termed them "court historians."

for mere politics. Between 1945 and 1948 there was an increasing awareness of the legitimacy of the Negro's demands and the Truman administration attempted to meet the problem with federal programs. After 1948, the main impetus to civil rights was provided by the federal courts. The third stage was finally reached in the United States Congress in 1964-65.

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HARRY S TRUMAN AS AN ADVOCATE OF CIVIL RIGHTS: POLITICS OR COMPASSION?

by

Harriet Aldstadt

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of Harry Truman and civil rights has received considerable attention from scholars, journalists, and, of course, blacks. It seemed to shock self-proclaimed liberals that Truman took a firmer stand on civil rights than did Franklin Roosevelt. As a border state southerner, Truman had not cultivated a reputation as an advocate of civil rights while in the Senate. To both professional liberals and staunch racists, Truman could have had only one motive for adopting civil rights as an issue: politics.

Politics from time to time changes from a definition of political activity to a dirty word. In 1948, as now, "politics" and "politicians" are terms of opprobrium closely approximating illegal activity. The popular assumption is that no elected or appointed official in government is able or willing to work hard or serve his country. It is assumed that all governmental figures work only for their own advancement and spend most of their time giving and accepting bribes. Though this accusation is an over-simplification of a complex process, the popular press abounds with exposé stories implying corruption in government. Obviously, the republic would have succumbed long before now had all these accusations been true.

The disgust with politics stems from a basic misunderstanding of America's form of government. At the risk of sounding simplistic, it is necessary to differentiate between a republic and a democracy. The United States government is a republic, and the registered voters of the country choose men at all levels of government to make decisions necessary to run the country. The key point to make here is that a man must appeal to various groups, usually called interest groups, in order to get elected. Once in office, a man listens to those who helped him reach office, but there is nothing sinister or intrinsically dishonest about this. The style of American government is a competition between interest groups.[1] It resembles the adversary system of justice. The side which makes the best case wins. This system has its flaws; as great lobbies go into action to achieve or thwart governmental action, the interests of those who belong to no mass grouping can be ignored. But now even consumers and housewives have a champion in Ralph Nader. As the editor of the Crisis wrote, "it pays Negroes, indeed, all Americans, to have a continuing [sic] organized group like the NAACP in existence."[2]

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[1]Representative statements of this conception of American government, in which this point of view is described at length, are V. O. Key, Parties, Politics, and Pressure Groups, and Ranney and Kendall, Democracy and the American Party System.

[2]"Editorial," Crisis, January, 1948, p. 9.

Given this system, the charge that something is done "just for politics" is ridiculous since practically every piece of legislation or governmental activity is an attempt to please one interest group or another. The way to have an effect on government is to join and support the interest groups of one's choice. In this way one can vote for those who favor one's particular interest. This sounds undemocratic and hints of machine politics, but at least such participation can provide an informed vote rather than a popularity contest based on good looks. Only when elections are contested on the basis of issues can the results have any meaning.

Interest groups are most influential at election time and at decision-making time in the government. Interest groups get out their voting faithful, then press elected officials for favorable decisions. Legislation reflects the results of organized opinion, not the highminded ideals of legislators. Therefore, one can assume that race and minority rights did not become a matter of governmental concern until Negroes organized themselves and were able to show muscle at the polls. The recognition of Negro problems came slowly to this country and its leaders, and the charge that Truman merely supported civil rights because it offered political advantage is naive, yet this is the most common interpretation this writer discovered.[3] The charge indicates that action on

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[3]William Berman, Barton Bernstein, Samuel Lubell, and Clifton Brock tend to belittle Truman's motives and abilities. Their condescension toward an uneducated midwestern "common" man is evident to this author.

civil rights is without value unless motivated by high ideals. The self-proclaimed liberals can exhibit disgust at Truman's "using" civil rights, but he did contribute to a reversal of a policy of inaction and rhetoric while most liberals still sent their children to private schools and lived in exclusive neighborhoods.

John Kennedy believed that "politics is an honorable profession" and never winced at being called a politician. He understood the necessity, given human nature, of bargaining and compromising to effect even the most laudable policies. It is to his credit that he managed to make the whole process look glamorous and modern. Eisenhower had disliked politics and considered himself above all such pettiness. President Truman had Kennedy's relish for political battles, but was unable to glamorize his style. He was able to win respect for his policies only when he went to the people directly and let them hear and "feel" his basic decency. He did not look or talk like a cheap politician in person; Thomas Dewey, who posed as the young statesman, did. Truman provided the combination of commitment and political savvy which enabled him to remind voters that the end of price controls was the result of politics, that the lack of public housing was politics, and that the exploitation of Negroes was politics, too. The young statesman, Dewey, and his non-political party seemed to be pursuing their goals in a surprisingly political manner.

This paper will not claim that Harry Truman was a model liberal. He saw political realities: Negroes were concentrated in important northern cities. Politicians from these areas demonstrated their concern for the Negro vote. Truman himself knew the importance of the Negro vote in his own re-election to the Senate in 1940. But President Truman was also, more importantly, a decent man who believed the Constitution applied to all Americans. With less than the highest ideals, President Truman did begin to educate the country to the necessity of civil rights legislation and achieved more by executive order and example than did his predecessors. The Democratic Party gave notice of its recognition of Negro political power in 1948 when it included a civil rights plank in its platform in defiance of southern Democrats.

The story of the adoption of civil rights as an issue by Truman and the Democratic Party is the subject of the following paper. The key points of interest will be the relative degree of political motivation and personal idealism present in the main characters who advocated the Negro's cause to the President and the Democratic Party. The main argument, which underlies the entire exposition, is that liberal historians and political scientists may be correct in stating that Truman's civil rights program was extremely limited. They may even say that the courts, not the executive,

led the civil rights revolution. But they can not deny that the President did act more firmly and openly in support of civil rights than any other President.

IMITATION OF CIVIL RIGHTS

The New Deal Legacy

Franklin D. Roosevelt is still a hero to those who suffered during the Depression. His famous optimism and concern managed to help people even when some of the New Deal programs failed. Perhaps the feeling that the President "really cared" impressed the unemployed or very poor more than federal programs ever could. The relief and welfare agencies set up under the New Deal helped millions to eat, but President Roosevelt gave a sense of self-respect to those dislocated by the economic crisis. He deserves praise for many programs; but in the area of civil rights, there is room for criticism.

Much of the New Deal was an economic program designed to regulate the abuses of large corporations and financial institutions. In curbing abuses, the New Deal programs regulated working hours, working conditions, and wages. It strengthened labor unions, and, in the long run, gave workers a chance to improve their lot. To help those who did not have jobs in private industry, the federal government undertook its own massive building projects and employed enlightened labor practices. Those who could not find work or were unable

to work received welfare payments of various kinds. These programs were aimed at "the poor," but no special legislation or action was uniquely designed for the poorest of the poor, the Negro.[1]

The New Deal was important to the Negro primarily because the programs did something for the underprivileged without excluding him.[2] Before the New Deal, the "Negro Problem" was confined to civil rights, education, charity and little more. By 1944, it involved "housing, nutrition, medicine, education, relief and social security, wages and hours, working conditions, child and woman labor, and lately (1944) the armed forces and the war industries."[3] It cannot be denied, however, that the Negro shared unequally in these advances. Franklin Roosevelt spoke "feelingly of the unfortunate, yet he understood and did not expect any rapid change in the existing class relationships. But he did mean to raise the minimum levels."[4] The Negro only received

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[1]Barton J. Bernstein, The Ambiguous Legacy: The Truman Administration and Civil Rights, a paper read at the American Historical Association Meeting in New York, December 29, 1966, Truman Library, Independence, Missouri, p. 1.

[2]Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy (New York: Harper & Bros., 1944), p. 74.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Rexford Tugwell, The Democratic Roosevelt (New York: Doubleday, 1957), p. 358.

attention in a tangential way. As this section will illustrate, the New Deal abided by existing racial discrimination in all areas, and, indeed, imposed discrimination in areas where it had not existed previously.

The question of Roosevelt's personal attitude toward the race problem is fascinating and will be debated for years to come. Roosevelt apologists contend that he only accepted discrimination because he needed southern support for his New Deal programs and later for war preparedness.[5] Southern Democrats saw to it that any help specifically for the Negroes was blocked,[6] and the President acquiesced. Supposedly, the Negroes would be helped by a general improvement of economic conditions, and their special problems would have to go unsolved, a sacrifice to the enactment of legislation for the general good. It is, however, hard to believe that the South, the poorest, almost colonial, area of the country would oppose legislation to curb financial and industrial exploitation. Southern agriculture was a particularly depressed sector of the economy, and the South simply could not refuse aid from the government. The farm subsidies and welfare payments given to poor whites made Roosevelt so popular that

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[5]Walter White, A Man Called White (New York: Viking Press, 1948), p. 169. White quotes the President as saying this when he was asked to support a fair employment practices act.

[6]Tugwell, Democratic Roosevelt, p. 358.

his occasional espousal of Negro causes was mutely accepted. He was so popular with the poor white southerner that even the racists refrained from calling him a "nigger lover," that kiss of death to liberals in the South.[7] It is worth asking, therefore, if Roosevelt could not have gone over the heads of southern racists (who, according to V. O. Key, were generally puppets of northern industry), and made an appeal to the voters for support of programs to help those who were suffering most--the rural Negroes.

Instead, the Administration, despite its liberal, humanitarian cast, perhaps actually hurt the Negro more than it helped him. The Department of Agriculture under Henry Wallace is an example of this. The Department of Agriculture contained a cluster of Felix Frankfurter's bright young men, and it was expected to do great things for the suffering farmers. Some of the more famous of these men were Guy Tugwell, Jerome Frank, Adlai Stevenson, Thurman Arnold, Abe Fortas, Alger Hiss, Lee Pressman, John Abt, and Nathan Witt.[8] Since these were mainly "city boys," they were expected to develop a farm policy along rational, not traditional lines.

The program which evolved was based on classical economics, the law of supply and demand, not on a new method to distribute surplus food to starving people. The Domestic

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[7]Myrdal, American Dilemma, p. 464.

[8]Charles E. Jacob, Leadership in the New Deal: the Administrative Challenge (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967), p. 15.

Allotment Plan was designed to help the land owners, not the 2.9 million tenant farmers. When production acreage was reduced, the owners were compensated, and since they needed fewer tenants, they released the tenants from the land. The result of enlightened and revolutionary agricultural policy was to drive the very poorest to desperation. No statistics exist to describe how much tenant farmers and families suffered as a result of the Domestic Allotment Plan, but the growing number of Negroes and poor whites in cities and in the North was a direct result of that policy.[9] Harry Truman had to deal with the massive population shift after the war. Farm relief reached only 50,000 Negro families.[10]

There were other flaws in what Roosevelt called Dr. New Deal. It did not embrace an anti-lynch law or oppose the poll tax. On federal projects like Boulder Dam and T.V.A., Negroes were not allowed to live in government-built towns. No Negro could get an F.H.A. insured loan on a house outside a Negro neighborhood, and the military remained segregated. There were very few Negroes in supervising or executive positions even within the civil service. Rather

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[9]M. S. Venkataramani, "Norman Thomas and the Farmers Union in Arkansas," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, October, 1960.

[10]"The Roosevelt Record," Crisis, November, 1940.

than make a Negro a supervisor, the technique was to establish an advisor on Negro affairs.[11] Finally, New Deal legislation maintained the wage differential between white and black even though Harry Hopkins and Aubrey Williams of the National Youth Administration fought this discrimination. Roosevelt was unwilling to fight the racist wing of the Democratic Party.[12]

The benefits which the New Deal brought to the Negro were minimal. He was not given a chance at better jobs or equal pay for equal work. He was confined to living in Negro neighborhoods. He was still denied the vote in the South.[13] Nevertheless, there was a feeling among blacks at that time that Roosevelt would insist that Negroes were part of America and must be considered in any program for the country as a whole.[14] One reason for this confidence was the President's wife.

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Leslie H. Fishel, Jr. and Benjamin Quarles, The Black American: A Documentary History (Illinois: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1967), p. 455.

[13] Richard Bardolph, The Negro Vanguard (New York: Rinehart, 1959), p. 256. In 1940, according to Dr. Bardolph, there were barely 200,000 registered Negro voters in the South.

[14] "Roosevelt Record," Crisis, November 1940.

Eleanor Roosevelt was a prominent champion of racial harmony, and believed that once the Negro had educational opportunities, discrimination would vanish in the face of intellectual improvement.[15] Her prime function in race relations was to speak for the Negro to the President and for the President to the Negro. She was helped in her liaison work by Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Interior, Oscar Chapman, Undersecretary of the Interior, and Dr. W. W. Alexander, a consultant on minority groups to the War Production Board. With them worked the self-proclaimed "black cabinet" which gave a great deal of pride to the black community.[16] Although, as previously mentioned, these men were advisors on Negro affairs rather than actual officials, their presence insured a recognition of the Negro's side of a problem. Robert C. Weaver was a protege of Harold Ickes' and served as racial advisor to the Department of the Interior. William H. Hastie served as a civilian aide to Secretary of War Stimson, and Benjamin O. Davis was the sole Negro general. Public relations expert Ted Poston was racial advisor to Elmer Davis of the Office of War Information. Frank S. Horne was the racial advisor to the Federal Public Housing Administration.[17] In this way, the Negro was at least represented in

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[15]Fishel, Black American, p. 462.

[16]Roi Ottley, New World a-Coming: Inside Black America (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), p. 257.

[17]Ibid., p. 263.

the area of public works, the military, war propaganda, and public housing, even if he had no significant political weight as yet. The Negro did not achieve political weight until the end of the war when enough Negroes had moved north to form a sizable bloc vote; but that is the subject of a later section.

There were at least two occasions, however, when the Negro demonstrated his growing political strength and his increasing determination to secure his rights. The first occasion was in Detroit in a dispute over the building of public housing. In 1942, the government began building low cost public housing, which was allotted to whites only. The Negro press and the "black cabinet" kept up such a barrage of protest that riots broke out. As a result, the Sojourner Truth Homes, named after a woman evangelist, were completed as Negro housing.[18] The second occasion was the proposed March on Washington to demand a Federal Fair Employment Practices Commission.[19] This battle has a long, hoary history and indicates that the pressures of Dr. Win the War helped the Negro more than Dr. New Deal.

The march was conceived as a means to protest the fact that in 1941 with the nation re-arming and the defense industry booming, only 2.5% of the workers in defense industry

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[18] Ibid., p. 266.

[19] Hereinafter cited as FEPC.

was non-white.[20] Black representatives had met with Sidney Hillman and William Knudsen who were the co-chairmen of the National Defense Board. In his typical fashion, Roosevelt had appointed opposites to work together. Hillman was a labor leader who, in 1948, fought for the liberal civil rights plank in the Democratic platform. Knudsen was the ex-head of General Motors and he refused to work for Negro employment opportunities. Industry took its cue from Knudsen and resisted hiring Negroes, despite Hillman's successful efforts to get labor to accept Negro co-workers. Roosevelt, according to Walter White, the head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People,[21] refused to take a stand against this discrimination because he said the South would revolt and it would upset the war effort.[22]

Since Roosevelt had refused to push for employment opportunities for Negroes, A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and other Negro leaders threatened a March on Washington.[23] The President sent his wife to try to get the march cancelled, but even she was refused. The black leaders were determined to get

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[20]Myrdal, American Dilemma, p. 412.

[21]Hereinafter cited as the NAACP.

[22]Louis Ruchames, Race, Jobs and Politics: The Story of FEPC (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), pp. 12-22.

[23]Myrdal, American Dilemma, p. 414.

the President to take a stand against discrimination. Finally, just before the threatened march, the President met with Randolph, White and representatives of the Army, Navy, and the War Production Board. He was finally convinced that he had to act or there would be a demonstration by the blacks which would have serious effect on American morale and which would provide the Nazis with propaganda material.[24]

The result of this pressure was Executive Order 8802, issued June 25, 1941, two days before the march was scheduled. The order set up a President's Committee on Fair Employment Practices to receive and investigate complaints.[25] The committee had no power to enforce compliance and could only use moral suasion and publicity as weapons. As long as the President stood behind the committee, it could have a limited success. The creation of such a committee was itself important as it represented "the most definite break in the tradition of federal unconcernedness about racial discrimination on the nonfarm labor market that has so far occurred."[26] Even William H. Hastie, Stimson's racial advisor, agreed that at first the federal government took

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[24]Ottley, New World, p. 292.

[25]Myrdal, American Dilemma, p. 415.

[26]Ibid., p. 416

definite steps to halt racial discrimination in war industries.[27] But the honeymoon lasted less than a year. Roosevelt, while personally upset at specific abuses, would not spend political capital to boost the FEPC. He transferred the committee to Paul McNutt's War Manpower Commission in the summer of 1942, and the committee could no longer report directly to the President to win his personal support. What little influence it had had was ended.[28] As Roosevelt biographer James Macgregor Burns recounts, "his tendency in wartime [was] to look on race relations more as a problem of efficient industrial mobilization than as a fundamental moral problem."[29]

The handling of the armed forces demonstrates the same semblance of movement which made the President look as though he were achieving more than he really was. In October, 1940, the War Department announced that Negro personnel should be increased in such a way that Negroes would constitute the same proportion in the Army as in the general population. This was designed to counteract the notion that Negroes do not make good soldiers. But those who were inducted

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[27]Fishel, Black American, p. 473.

[28]James Macgregor Burns, Roosevelt: Soldier of Freedom (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1970), p. 265.

[29]Ibid., p. 266.

were kept strictly segregated.[30] The President supported Secretary of War Stimson who believed that "The Negro still lacks the particular initiative which a commanding officer of men needs in war."[31] The Navy had no Negroes except a few messmen. The Air Force under Stuart Symington, had Negro pilots, thanks partially to the support of Harry S Truman, the senator from Missouri. In May, 1939, after meeting two Negro pilots who had flown a biplane from Chicago to Washington, D. C., Truman agreed to support legislation to assure training of Negroes under the Civilian Pilot Training Program.[32] The Negroes flew, but in segregated squadrons. Incredibly, Negro Military Police were not allowed to carry guns in the South and Negro troops were harrassed by police while marching in formation with a white officer.[33] On one issue, at least, Stimson deserves credit. Many foreign nations did not want to accept black American soldiers, but Stimson held his ground and insisted all American troops be accepted.[34] But Roosevelt and Stimson refused to integrate

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[30]Myrdal, American Dilemma, p. 420.

[31]Burns, Roosevelt, p. 265.

[32]Lee Nichols, Breakthrough on the Color Front (New York: Random House, 1954), p. 83.

[33]Myrdal, American Dilemma, p. 422.

[34]Burns, Roosevelt, p. 266.

the services because it might harm the war effort. Stimson's racial advisor, William H. Hastie, resigned because no action was taken to end discrimination. Hastie argued in vain that discrimination destroyed fighting ability and demoralized the black troops.[35] The war itself was being fought to guarantee racial toleration, cooperation and equality, but the United States was fighting it with segregated troops.

Other areas of federal action to help the Negro were equally unsuccessful. The Office of Education issued a plea to white southern universities to admit Negro scholars. The Jackson Mississippi Daily News told the department to "go straight to hell. . . . Nobody but an ignorant, fat-headed ass would propose such an unthinkable and impossible action."[36] The matter was dropped.

The Federal Housing Authority regulated public housing according to "local custom." When in doubt, however, it always provided segregated housing. In some areas, like Ann Arbor, Michigan, the Federal Housing Authority actually instituted segregated housing in a previously integrated area.[37]

Malcolm Ross of the FEPC suggested that Warm Springs facilities be used for Negroes, no doubt for reasons of public

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[35]Fishel, Black American, pp. 473-475. Truman later appointed Hastie governor of the Virgin Islands.

[36]Burns, Roosevelt, p. 463.

[37]Ibid., p. 466.

relations. The President wrote to his wife instructing her to refuse, pointing out that Tuskegee Institute had a whole unit of its own.[38] Yet, with no sense of hypocrisy, on October 12, 1942, Roosevelt chided employers who would not hire Negroes and women in one of his fireside chats.[39]

Evidently, the President regretted the gross injustices done the Negro, but he was somewhat prejudiced himself, and acted more from noblesse oblige than conviction. He was also unwilling to sacrifice his New Deal proposals, and later the war effort, in what he considered a futile attempt to change racial relations.

> He was a political man, a democrat; he believed in getting things done with full, if not always complete consent. Getting this approval very often required compromise. He took what he could get for what he had to give.[40]

He was willing to let racial prejudice prevail if in return he could get support on matters he considered more important.

The picture was not unreservedly grim, however. At times, the President would balk at the dominance of conservatives. His famous legislative purge in 1938 was aimed at "the reactionary elements in the South."[41] He learned by

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[38] Ibid., p. 463.

[39] Ibid., p. 271.

[40] Tugwell, Democratic Roosevelt, p. 10.

[41] Samuel J. Rosenman, Working with Roosevelt (New York: Harper's Bros., 1952), p. 463.

his lack of success that the only way to reconstruct the South was to change the voting laws. The Negroes and the poor in general were barred by the poll tax; when the poll tax could be eliminated, the reactionaries would begin to fall.

By 1944, the President had decided the two parties needed realignment. Wendell Willkie, who had run against Roosevelt in 1940, had proposed a sharp division between the conservatives and liberals into two parties. All the liberals would enter the Democratic Party, conservatives the Republican. That way, the liberals would run their party unfettered by the old guard, and naturally win all the elections. Roosevelt sympathized, "I think the time has come for the Democratic Party to get rid of its reactionary elements in the South and to attract to it the liberals in the Republican Party."[42] For obvious political reasons, the meeting between Willkie and Roosevelt's liaison, Samuel Rosenman, was delayed until after the 1944 election. With great secrecy, Willkie and Rosenman met and discussed how the new liberal party could be formed. They parted in good spirits and high hopes, but Roosevelt never mentioned it again.[43] One theory of the collapse of the realignment is that Willkie had become too idealistic. He had visions of a world

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[42] Ibid., p. 463.

[43] Ibid.

government and universal brotherhood. He had become a disciple of Gunnar Myrdal and strongly advocated civil rights.[44] He was considered a close personal friend of Walter White, and made no secret of his disapproval of racial bias. Generally speaking, he simply went too far for the President, although Roosevelt had turned again to domestic issues in his 1944 campaign.

On October 31, 1944, while campaigning in Chicago, he said,

> In the America of tomorrow . . . our Economic Bill of Rights . . . must be applied to all our citizens, irrespective of race,creed or color. . . . I believe that the Congress of the United States should by law make the [FEPC] Committee permanent.[45]

In reply to Republicans who had been attacking Sidney Hillman as the real boss[46] of the party and the President, Roosevelt deplored the blatant anti-Semitism being used. In Boston he said,

> It is our duty to them [soldiers] to make sure, big as this country is, there is not room in it for racial or religious intolerance--and that there is no room for snobbery.[47]

Just before his death, the President seemed to be groping for the humanitarian ideals of the New Deal, and by that time

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[44]Burns, Roosevelt, p. 512.

[45]Rosenman, Working, p. 498.

[46]"Clear Everything with Sidney" was a phrase the Republicans used to insinuate that the President did not make his own decisions.

[47]Rosenman, Working, p. 479.

he was more aware of the problems of a vast, technological, mass society. "Roosevelt recognized a fact of first importance in that America had become a modern, urban, industrialized, interdependent mass society."[48] He was not tied to dreamy visions of the nineteenth century or bemused by the claims of any ideology. If he was not a staunch fighter for Negro rights, he at least included the Negro in his political plans for a better America.

If the Negro did not make the progress he expected under Roosevelt, he had at least become visible within the government. The judicial process was beginning to show results with the Smith vs. Allwright decision in 1944 that the all white primary was unconstitutional.[49] Still, the Negro could not make demands until he was politically organized and mobilized,and this was not achieved to an effective level until after the war. A second deterrent to Negro progress was the war itself. White America refused to consider dramatic racial changes while in the midst of a total war effort. The black was asked to be patient and wait until the end of the war, and then his demands would be heard. The blacks waited, and Harry Truman was the man who had to listen.

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[48]Jacob, Leadership in the New Deal, p. 24.

[49]Reynold J. Davis, "A Study of Federal Civil Rights Program During the Presidency of Harry S Truman" (unpublished thesis at the University of Kansas, 1959), p. 8.

RHETORIC OF CIVIL RIGHTS

First Years of the Truman Presidency

After the war, the blacks had many reasons to believe that they would finally get government action on their demands. To begin with, there were many new sources of Negro strength at the beginning of World War II which could take advantage of any windfall the mobilization and fighting might provide. Perhaps the most important new source of strength from a political standpoint was the growth of Negro organizations like the NAACP and the Urban League. The two mass organizations could impress candidates seeking office and men already in office with Negro power at the polls.

The new political strength derived from a movement of the Negro population from the rural South to the urban areas of the North. This movement began during World War I when agents went south to gather black laborers. They gave away free tickets north, and by 1920 there were 150,000 blacks in New York alone.[1] The effects of the Domestic Allotment Program upon the black tenant farmers has already been discussed. The net result of the program was

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[1]Ottley, New World, p. 35.

to provide a further impetus to the flight of the Negro north. World War II served as a further stimulant to Negro migration. Between 1940 and 1946, over a million Negroes moved north to get defense jobs. In 1940, northern Negroes comprised 4-5% of all potential voters in states like New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, and Illinois,[2] and the political leaders of those states were well aware of that fact. As long as the Negro vote had been small, the Democrats had conceded it to the Republicans. Roosevelt had received only 23% of the black vote in 1932.[3] He received better than 60% of it by 1944. His New Deal and the fact that the federal government had 200,000 black employees in 1945 had moved the black voter to the Democratic Party.[4] In New York City, despite the establishment of an FEPC by Thomas Dewey, the Republican governor, the 350,000 black voters of the city voted Independent and re-elected Fiorello La Guardia mayor three times. La Guardia was responsible for the hiring of 5,000 Negroes in the city civil service.[5]

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[2]William C. Berman, "The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration" (unpublished doctoral dissertation at Ohio State University, 1963), Truman Library, p. 7.

[3]Roi Ottley, Black Odyssey: The Story of the Negro in America (New York: Charles Scribners, 1948), p. 265.

[4]Ibid., p. 266.

[5]Ottley, New World, p. 216.

In 1943, the Negro had representatives in twelve state legislatures; Chicago had William Dawson as a representative in the House of Representatives, and Harlem had five Negro judges on the city bench.[6] Slowly, blacks were moving from metropolitan power bases into government.

Other factors contributed to increased political power. The Negro press had improved and increased its circulation. This made it possible to educate and inform black citizens so that it became possible to exert mass action and pressure.[7] The establishment of the Sojourner Truth Homes in Detroit in 1942 and the March on Washington were both examples of the effects of the press. In addition, the press encouraged mass economic pressure. In St. Louis, the slogan of the black papers was "Jobs for Negroes" and the Urban League organized a boycott of a chain store which sold to Negroes but refused to hire them.[8] At the urging of the Pittsburgh Courier, the Housewives League used the boycott against stores which discriminated. In 1933, the "Don't buy where you can't work" movement was published by the Amsterdam Star. Unfortunately, the object and target of economic boycott was often a Jew since many

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[6]Ibid., p. 205.

[7]Ruchames, Race, Jobs, and Politics, p. 9.

[8]Ottley, New World, p.113.

storeowners were Jewish. The newspapers themselves exhibited anti-Semitism and this almost led to a dangerous alliance with Nazi front organizations. Marcus Garvey, a prominent proponent of black pride in the 1920's, publicly spoke of "Jewish control" of Negro economic life. Moderates prevailed over anti-Semitic elements and by 1942 the Crisis and the Amsterdam Star were advocating a union of oppressed people--Negroes and Jews.[9]

There were also new allies for the Negro such as the Congress of Industrial Organizations[10] which had no racial discrimination, and the American Civil Liberties Union which was dedicated to protecting the civil rights of all Americans. These new friends were welcomed by a new Negro leadership which rejected the old submissive policy of leaders like Booker T. Washington. Men like Roy Wilkins, Walter White, and A. Philip Randolph were infected by the idea of black pride as enunciated by Marcus Garvey, and were not willing to wait meekly for the white man to grant equality.[11] They were more than willing to use whatever pressure they could.

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[9] Ibid., pp. 113-133.

[10] Hereinafter cited C.I.O.

[11] Ruchames, Race, Jobs, and Politics, p. 9.

In 1944, Gunnar Myrdal's study of black Americans was published under the title An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy. According to Myrdal, the dilemma was the contradiction between "the American dedication to high ideals" and her shortcomings in her treatment of black Americans.

> Americans are accustomed to inscribe their ideals in laws. . . . Legislating ideals has also a "function" of dedicating the nation to the task of gradually approaching them.[12]

Myrdal saw a number of reasons why the Negro "problem" would mount high in importance after World War II. The first reason was the danger of intensified economic dislocations in the postwar era and their effect on Negro employment. He said there would also be new Negro demands because of the heightened expectations created by war propaganda which extolled the virtues of democracy and the evils of fascism and racism. Racism was completely discredited in American propaganda, and the Negro took advantage of the American revulsion against genocide. Another set of factors which increased the importance of Negro demands was their increased educational level, intensified group consciousness, and growing discontent.[13]

Not only was the Negro himself changing, but traditional concepts of race and the Negro were undergoing re-evaluation.

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[12] p. 14.

[13] Ibid., p. 27.

White racism was being debunked by increased evidence, uncovered by scientists and social scientists, that differences between the races were more a matter of environment than heredity. Myrdal contributed to this new awareness of racial equality when he demonstrated how imprecise the word "race" was.[14] This intellectual change combined with the increased number of jobs Negroes secured during the war effort made arguments about Negro inferiority, laziness, and inability to handle machinery seem absurd.

In short, by the end of the war, it had become unfashionable in "intellectual" circles to admit the racist ideas. The federal government was finally beginning to move away from support of the southern racial system. Southern senators were not being allowed to dictate the country's racial policies. There was an increased awareness of the political and legal injustices, if not the social and personal tragedies, which the Negro suffered. The Negro was no longer a "southern problem" which the rest of the country could ignore. Blacks had become a highly visible minority in every northern city, and they had special problems for the cities and states to handle. As Stewart Alsop commented acidly in a recent issue of Harper's, the South was having its revenge on the North for having won the Civil

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[14] Ibid., p. 149.

War by "flooding the North with something like ten million [1970] functionally illiterate and socially alienated blacks, educated according to the hideously discriminatory and unbearably unjust standards of the South."[15] The North was poorly prepared to handle these destitute, helpless people and did very little to improve their condition. But, especially among the educated, the Negro was at least accepted as a human being and an American citizen.

There were, of course, southerners who were not racists, and who deplored the violence done to the black man. Ralph McGill of the Atlanta Constitution, Hodding Carter, editor of a small newspaper in Mississippi, and Estes Kefauffer of Tennessee were leaders of an emerging "southern liberalism."[16] These liberals spoke feelingly of a new South, one which would give the black his political and human rights. According to Carter, the South was trying to improve its race relations, and it was only a matter of time before all men would be treated equally.[17] These men believed that attacks on the poll tax and lynchings were unwarranted since few places still had a poll tax and lynching was murder according to state laws anyhow. Southern

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[15]"Letters," Harper's, Vol. 241, August, 1970, p. 7.

[16]Emile Bertrand Adler, "Why the Dixiecrats Failed," Journal of Politics, XV, 1948, p. 366.

[17]New York Times Magazine, August 8, 1948, p. 10.

liberals believed that racism was no longer a respectable issue, even in the most backward areas of the South, and through such interracial groups as the Southern Regional Council, they were working to end the poll tax and lynchings.[18] They also believed that the South would lose the respect of the nation, and its political power, if it insisted on maintaining its traditional racial policies. The optimism of the men would have been heartening if it had not been disproved by the continuation and intensification of lynchings, beatings, church bombings, and assassinations.

There were two Supreme Court decisions which helped the Negro in the South. The first struck down the all white primary; in the one-party South, the primary was the only contest. The second decision ended segregation in interstate travel. The latter decision was prompted by the mistreatment of Negro soldiers during the war. Soldiers often went days without food while travelling because restaurants and snack shops refused to serve blacks.[19] The families of servicemen faced insults and hunger if they tried to visit their men. Then, there was the added problem that most military bases were in the South. Northern blacks had begun to realize just how bad things were and to demand federal action.

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[18]William G. Carleton, "The Fate of Our Fourth Party," Yale Review, Spring, Vol. 38, 1949, p. 450.

[19]New Republic, January 22, 1944. See also Moon's Balance of Power, p. 207.

Thus when Harry Truman became president in 1945, the problem of civil rights was only one of the many he faced. The ending of World War II and the detonation of the atomic bomb made civil rights seem a secondary issue. The black man, however, was not about to retreat from the gains, slim though they were, that he had made under the New Deal and during World War II. Walker White, the head of the NAACP, stated the basic demands of the Negro in a speech given in the summer of 1942:

> We demand from America all the rights accorded to our white fellow citizens, the rights to which we would be entitled if the professed democratic ideals of equal rights for all regardless of race, creed, or color were really carried out. . . . We demand the right to live and work for our country in defense industries and the right to die for our country without segregation or discrimination in the armed forces. . . . [20]

Roosevelt had managed to give the Negro just enough improvement in his station to prevent real trouble, but had not altered basic patterns or alleviated basic problems. This was Truman's inheritance.

The President's background gave no indication of a liberal attitude toward race. He was a compromiser from a border state, a state with racial attitudes similar to those of the deep South. He was from a lower middle-class family and a small town. He was a Baptist and a Legionnaire.

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[20] Ottley, New World, p. 248.

In short, he had some of the characteristics of a sociological model of a racist. More importantly for the Negro, he was, and is, a decent, honest, fair-minded man of stubborn courage.

Truman's senatorial record on the race issue was creditable if not dramatic. He had supported legislation beneficial to the Negro while extremists fought and filibustered. For example, in 1938, the Senate considered an anti-lynching bill and Truman supported the proposal; in addition, he voted to end the southern filibuster on the bill.[21] Samuel Lubell, a noted political scientist with good liberal credentials, attributed his support to opportunism: "All my sympathies are with you," Truman reportedly told the filibusterers, "but the Negro vote in Kansas City and St. Louis is too important."[22] This statement was "reportedly" made by Truman, and it has been widely accepted as representing the President's true feelings. Other evidence leads to different conclusions.

In 1940, when Truman was running for re-election to the Senate, he supported an amendment to the Selective Service Act to prevent discrimination against members of minority groups who had volunteered for the armed services. In the

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[21]Bernstein, Ambiguous Legacy, p. 3.

[22]Samuel Lubell, The Future of American Politics (New York: Anchor Books, 1956), p. 8.

Senate, he was, therefore, not associated with the Bilbos who fought any legislation designed to improve the Negro's lot, but was a supporter of the moderate wing of the Democratic Party.[23]

During his 1940 campaign, Truman made several rather liberal speeches. On July 14, 1940, he said before the NAACP that,

> We all know the Negro is here to stay and in no way can be removed from our political and economic life and we should recognize his inalienable rights as specified in our Constitution. Can any man claim protection of our laws if he denies that protection to others?[24]

He concluded his speech by saying that he was opposed to lynching, segregated housing, and inferior schools for blacks.[25] In closing he said, "Negroes want justice, not social relations," thus betraying the limited nature of his racial attitude.[26] On July 15, 1940, speaking in Sedalia, Missouri, he reaffirmed his statements made the day before by saying that "in giving to the Negroes the rights

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[23]The term "Bilbos" is found in Henry Moon, The Balance of Power: The Negro Vote (New York: Doubleday, 1948).

[24]Berman, "Politics of Civil Rights," p. 12.

[25]Charles R. Bush, "The Truman Civil Rights Program," Senior Honors Thesis, Harvard University, April, 1964, Truman Library, p. 10.

[26]Ibid.

that are theirs, we are only acting in accord with ideals of true democracy."[27]

Truman's appeals to democracy and the Constitution were not the usual campaign rhetoric. The obvious respect which the man had for both was evident in his speeches and is amply borne out in his memoirs. After reading his autobiography, it is very hard to imagine his using the Constitution in a cynical or hypocritical way; his reverence for the document is evident throughout the book. When he said the Constitution was meant to apply to everyone, he was not using empty oratory before a black audience. In accordance with this belief, in his second term as Senator, he supported Roosevelt's establishment of the FEPC and, when a bill to end the poll tax was blocked by a southern filibuster, he voted for cloture.[28] He did not make his reputation as an advocate of Negro rights, but as a man who insisted on even-handed justice for all.[29]

Roosevelt's selection of Truman to be his vice-presidential candidate in 1944 came as something of a surprise to many. However, the city bosses did not like Henry Wallace,

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[27]Berman, "Politics of Civil Rights," p. 11.

[28]Ibid., p. 13.

[29]In his memoirs, Truman summarized his sentiments nicely: "My only goal was equal opportunity and security under the law for all classes of Americans." Memoirs, II, p. 183.

whom Roosevelt had tapped for vice president in 1940. Wallace made the "regulars" in the Democratic Party uneasy because of his lofty idealism and such powerful political leaders as Edward Flynn of the Bronx, Robert Hannegan of St. Louis, Edward J. Kelly of Chicago, and Frank Hague of Jersey City were anxious to get a more "professional" vice president. Sidney Hillman, a prominent labor leader who was close to the party regulars, was primarily responsible for getting Roosevelt to write a note saying either Truman or William O. Douglas was acceptable. Since Truman's name was first on the note, it seemed as though Roosevelt preferred him. Truman was not told of this until the night before the nomination of the vice president.[30] He had gone to the convention committed to James F. Byrnes, but the blacks, in a public outcry, had effectively vetoed Byrnes for his unreconstructed racial attitudes.[31] Truman did not believe he was Roosevelt's choice until the President, in a phone call to Hannegan which Truman overheard, asked Truman to accept out of patriotism and party loyalty.[32]

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[30]Truman exclaimed when he learned he was Roosevelt's choice, "but why the hell didn't he tell me in the first place?" James Macgregor Burns, The Lion and the Fox (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1956), p. 466.

[31]White, A Man Called White, p. 267.

[32]Alfred Steinberg, The Man from Missouri (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1962), p. 215.

Truman was selected because he was from a border state and had a good reputation for being a hard worker and an honest man. As chairman of the committee to investigate defense contracts, he had quietly saved the government millions of dollars. He was also a man who did not offend either white supremists or blacks. Furthermore, he was acceptable to the C.I.O., New Dealers, professional politicians, the city bosses, and the South--in other words, the major components of the Democratic Party.[33] Robert Hannegan, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, had been his campaign manager in his race for the Senate in 1940, and Hannegan pushed hard for Truman's acceptance as vice presidential candidate.[34] Though the fact that Truman was chosen because he was inoffensive seems ignoble, he was also chosen for his integrity and loyalty. Even though Roosevelt had not supported Truman for the Senate in 1940, Truman did not turn against him. Truman was a New Deal supporter and a political regular on whom the party could depend. Little did the party dream, despite ghoulish talk of Roosevelt's health, that within a year Truman would be the leader of the nation. He obviously had good points, and

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[33]Richard H. Rovere, "President Harry," Harper's July, Vol. 197, 1948, p. 28.

[34]Dayton D. McKean, "Political Machines and National Elections," Annals of the American Association of Political and Social Sciences, Parties and Politics, 1948, Vol. 259, p. 46.

it was meant as a compliment that Alben Barkley, senator from Kentucky, called Truman a real "professional."[35]

Since Roosevelt did not see fit to brief him on major policy decisions, Truman was left at Roosevelt's death with little preparation. With all the responsibilities facing him, it seemed to many observers that he would be able to do no more than stay afloat. In fact, he found his feet quickly, spending no time worrying about his inadequacies. He asked Roosevelt's cabinet to stay with him and help him through the difficult transition period. All agreed. The transition period was a rather unhappy time, as are all such transitions necessitated by sudden death. Many holdovers from Roosevelt's days were anxious to leave the government. One by one they resigned to be replaced by men of Truman's choice. As the New Dealers resigned, rumors spread that they were being "purged" by Truman. The only case that could be called a real purge was that of Henry A. Wallace, Secretary of Commerce.

After a year of serving in the Cabinet, Wallace became convinced that Truman was not following the policies of Roosevelt in his relations with the Soviet Union. Wallace thought Roosevelt trusted Stalin and that rapprochement

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[35]Alben Barkley, That Reminds Me (New York: Doubleday, 1954), p. 127. Roosevelt had encouraged Lloyd Stark, governor of Missouri, to run for Senate. Truman, Memoirs, Vol. 1, pp. 159-163.

between the two countries was possible. Truman and his new Secretary of State felt differently. Wallace was also chagrined that an upstart from Missouri had become president while, he, as Roosevelt's heir apparent, was a mere Secretary of Commerce.[36] In addition, the "upstart" was proving to be a very independent chief executive who certainly did not ask the advice of the Secretary of Commerce.

Wallace publicly challenged the President's foreign policy in a speech given September 12, 1946.[37] He had written Truman an unsolicited letter July 23, 1946, which Truman had ignored.[38] When Wallace realized that he was not going to influence foreign policy from within the cabinet, he decided to speak out. Wallace insisted that he had shown a copy of the speech to Truman, and that Truman had read it.[39] Truman, in his Memoirs, said that he did not read the speech, but that Wallace told him that he was going to examine foreign affairs "through Russian eyes."[40] At any rate, the

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[36]William Harlan Hale, "What Makes Wallace Run?," Harper's, March, 1948, p. 241.

[37]Editorial, New Republic, September 30, 1946.

[38]Truman recalls his opinion of Wallace in his Memoirs, I, p. 185; he felt Wallace was "honest but inexperienced." Dr. Venkataramani felt that the split between Wallace and Truman was a microcosm of the defection of the liberals from Truman.

[39]Karl M. Schmidt, Henry A. Wallace: Quixote Crusade, 1948 (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1960), p. 19.

[40]Truman, Memoirs, II, p. 557.

speech emphasized cooperation and understanding with Russian aims at a time when Secretary of State Byrnes was negotiating at Paris to get the Russians out of Polish and East European affairs. Byrnes informed Truman that if the President agreed with Wallace's speech, he could find a new Secretary of State. Truman had instructed Byrnes to "get tough" with the Russians and to quit "babying" them.[41] Byrnes certainly felt that a speech which envisioned a sphere of influence for the Russians was not a part of a "get tough" policy. Truman agreed with Byrnes far more than with Wallace and asked for the resignation of the Secretary of Commerce. Wallace released to the press his letter of July 23, 1946, and a split in the Democratic Party and the nation between "hard liners" and "soft liners" was opened up.[42] The importance of this split is examined in a later chapter.

This was the most acrimonious departure of a New Dealer; the others like Frances Perkins, Chester Bowles, and Francis Biddle left quietly. Some of them had spent twelve trying years in government and were simply tired. Others, like Harold Ickes, left because they believed their influence had waned. There was a new group seizing the reins of power; this group was more midwestern and this gave rise to the charge

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[41]Dean Acheson, Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1969), p. 190.

[42]Ibid., p. 192.

of "cronyism" and to the accusation that the President had purged good, liberal, New Dealers to make room for his friends.[43] At first glance, this seems a justified complaint, but although Truman did turn to those whom he knew and most trusted, he quickly readjusted his circle of advisors to admit another, new group of advisors which represented the ideals, if not the programs, of the New Deal. These young advisors created the Fair Deal and helped the President win in 1948.

The men closest to the President during the first months in office were startlingly different from social worker types like Frances Perkins and Harry Hopkins. The most highly publicized Truman crony was Brigadier General Harry Vaughn, an old friend from Independence. Evidently, Vaughn had always wanted a military career, so Truman made him his military aide and a general in the National Guard. Although he was widely criticized in the press for favoritism, the President stood by his friend.[44] In fact, there is no evidence that Vaughn was more than a friend who offered the President relaxation and companionship--there were other men to give him advice on serious matters.

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[43]Roy V. Peel, "The 1948 Preconvention Campaign," Annals, p. 85.

[44]Eric F. Goldman, Rendezvous with Destiny (New York: A. Knopf, 1952), p. 408.

John Snyder, another Missourian, became Secretary of the Treasury. He, however, had experience in government. His record in federal-business relations was creditable. He had been appointed Federal Loan Administrator, executive assistant to Jesse Jones in the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, and director of the Defense Plants Corporation.[45] Snyder was unpopular with the liberals because of his pro-business bias and general conservatism. Whether he was "Babbitish" as Eric Goldman terms him is another question.[46] Robert Hannegan, an old political ally from St. Louis, became Postmaster General. Charlie Ross, an old classmate and correspondent for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch became press secretary within a month of Truman's becoming president. This infusion of midwestern blood into the Washington artery caused many fevers and shakes in the liberal establishment. The press made a fuss over Truman's friendship with California oilman Edwin W. Pauley. Pauley, however, was treasurer of the Democratic Party and found the money to run the campaigns, and the President could not ignore him. Despite dire predictions, Pauley was not rewarded by receiving complete control over all off-shore oil rights.[47] Leslie

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[45]Truman, Memoirs, I, p. 56.

[46]Goldman, Rendezvous, p. 407.

[47]Ibid., p. 415.

Biffle of Arkansas, secretary of the Senate and Dr. John Steelman, who was a special advisor on labor, completed the circle of midwestern "cronies."

The President knew he had to have his own cabinet and could not work efficiently with men selected by another man. Though he perhaps relied too heavily on friends from Missouri in the first few months of his tenture, Truman eventually remedied his obvious mistakes and created a cabinet which had a great deal of talent. He appointed some outstanding cabinet members, namely, Dean Acheson, James Forrestal, Fred Vinson, and George Marshal.[48] What is more, he used his cabinet. He wanted them to give advice, and he encouraged conflicting ideas. However, once decisions were made, he expected the cabinet members to carry them out.[49] He was loyal to his advisors and expected them to be loyal to him.

The first year of the Truman presidency was characterized by dramatic foreign events that came with the end of World War II, and the President had to pay primary attention to foreign policy. The opening of the United Nations, the Polish question, the Russian presence in Eastern Europe, the Atomic bomb, and the peace treaties loomed large in the

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[48]Richard F. Fenno, The President's Cabinet: An Analysis of the Period from Wilson to Eisenhower (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), p. 44.

[49]Ibid.

President's thoughts. There was a chance that the Negro would be asked to be patient again--to wait until the post-war problems were solved. Aside from problems of foreign policy, Truman had to lead the country to the conversion to a peace time economy, solve a massive housing shortage, and calm a restive labor force. Unfortunately for executive leadership, Congress had begun to reassert itself and was unwilling to follow the President.[50] Robert Taft, the leading Republican in the Senate, had become a spokesman for those who felt the federal government had done quite enough in the economic field and that organized labor had become too strong. In working for his domestic and foreign programs, Truman faced a formidable opponent.

The issue of central concern to the Negro during the first year of the Truman presidency was the establishment of a permanent FEPC. Though its power had been diluted under Roosevelt, it represented the principle that Negroes had a right to a fair share of jobs. The appropriation for the continuance of the FEPC was before Congress when Truman became President, and in a message to Congress on September 6, 1945, he endorsed the formation of a permanent FEPC.[51] This was reassuring to liberals and blacks. He also sent a

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[50]Rovere, "President Harry," Harper's, July, 1948, p. 27.

[51]Bernstein, Ambiguous Legacy, pp. 1-10.

public letter to Representative Adolph Sabath (D.Ill.), the chairman of the House Rules Committee, declaring his desire that the bill for a permanent FEPC be reported out.[52] Unfortunately, all the FEPC eventually got was a reduced appropriation. The wartime FEPC died of malnutrition in June, 1946. All the President had done in his first year in office to further civil rights was to speak twice in favor of equal opportunity of employment--not a very strong civil rights record. But his advisors at that time were not terribly sensitive to the problem, and there were many other issues of dramatic importance that needed attention. In all likelihood, a voluntary FEPC which relied on moral persuasion had outlived its usefulness and was not worth a damaging fight in Congress. During his second year as President, Truman showed a greater concern for civil rights. Violence in the South drew the attention of the President and his administration to the problems faced by black Americans and convinced them that the federal government had to take action.

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[52]Ruchames, Race, Jobs, and Politics, p. 126.

PANTOMIME OF CIVIL RIGHTS

Truman and the Democrats 1947-1948

In the months immediately following the end of World War II, southern racists once again began to preach hatred and violence. Eugene Talmadge of Georgia and Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi ran for office with violently racist campaigns. Five Negroes were lynched in Georgia within three days of Talmadge's nomination. There was an awful irony in reading newspaper stories of beatings, lynchings, executions and cross-burnings less than a year after the same papers had pictured Nazi concentration camps. The fact the violence had been done to black servicemen and black veterans increased the nation's and the administration's outrage.[1] Truman stated that his administration became involved in civil rights because the rights of American citizens were being contravened, and it was the duty of the federal government to protect them.[2] President Truman personally, as well as legally, could not accept the maiming and murder of Americans by Americans without action.[3] The

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[1]White, A Man Called White, pp. 322 ff.

[2]Reynold J. Davis, "A Study of Federal Civil Rights Program during the Presidency of Harry S Truman," an unpublished thesis at the University of Kansas, 1959, Truman Library, p. 151.

[3]Ibid.

nature of the action he and his administration took surprised liberals by its strength. It served to isolate and outlaw the blind racists and deny them the silence of the law; for the first time, the nation was informed of specific abuses and the compliance of local officials was demonstrated. Before this time, the strongest statement on civil rights had come from J. Howard McGrath in April, 1944, while he was serving as U.S. Solicitor General. He said any "state or party official who attempts to prevent a person from voting will be in violation of Sec. 18 of the Criminal Code."[4] The federal government had assumed limited jurisdiction over voting rights, but had not done anything to stop lynchings. The old shibboleth of states' rights was being used by the South to prevent federal legislation to punish lynchers. The South claimed lynching was murder, which it was, under state jurisdiction. But not a single conviction for murder or assault came out of the lynchings committed in the South during the 1940's, though those guilty were generally known.

These facts were brought before the President by the National Emergency Committee against Mob Violence. This group, led by Walter White and composed of members of the so-called liberal establishment, met with the President on

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[4]Moon, Balance of Power, p. 196.

September 19, 1946, just before the congressional elections. Included in the group were James Carey, secretary of the C.I.O.; Boris Shishkin of the American Federation of Labor; Dr. Herman Reissig of the Federated Council of Churches of Christ in America; Dr. Channing H. Tobias, director of the Phelps-Stokes Fund; and Leslie Perry, an administrative assistant to the NAACP.[5] The groups presented first hand accounts of the violence and demanded federal action. The President was shocked and claimed he had no idea things were as bad as the group described them to be.[6] It is tempting to dramatize the President's reaction and argue that he underwent a conversion at this point, and became dedicated to the cause of civil rights. Actually, he was aware of most of the trouble and had prepared an answer to the group's demands before they appeared.[7] Truman and a special assistant, David K. Niles,had discussed just how far the federal government could, and should, go. Niles, a holdover from the Roosevelt administration, suggested that the President appoint a committee to investigate the charges made by the National Emergency Committee, and to report back to the President. When Truman proposed this

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[5]White, A Man Called White, p. 330.

[6]Ibid., p. 331. See also, Henry Moon, Balance of Power, p. 186. The most notorious incidents, and the ones which upset Truman most according to White, were the murder of two veterans and their wives and the blinding of another veteran.

[7]Berman, "Politics of Civil Rights," p. 41.

action, Channing Tobias charged that this was no more than a dramatic gesture which committed the government to nothing specific.[8] There is ample evidence to suspect that this was exactly what Truman and Niles had planned,[9] not because they wanted the freedom to do nothing, but because they wanted a thorough investigation of the charges.

When the President announced the formation of the President's Committee on Civil Rights on December 5, 1946, it was obvious that it was more than a gesture. The committee was composed of forceful, prominent liberals who could give an honest appraisal of the violence. The chairman was Charles E. Wilson, president of General Electric, who had publicly stated that civil rights was the most important domestic issue facing America. Also on the committee were Charles Luckman of Lever Brothers; Rev. Francis J. Haas, Catholic clergyman; Sadie T. Alexander, a Negro lawyer from Philadelphia; James B. Carey of the C.I.O.; Boris Shishkin of the American Federation of Labor; Rabbi Roland Gittelsohn; Frank Graham, president of the University of North Carolina; John S. Dickey, president of Dartmouth; Channing Tobias, Franklin Roosevelt, Jr.; Mrs. M. E. Tilly, a prominent southern churchwoman; Morris

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[8]White, A Man Called White, p. 331.

[9]Berman, "Politics of Civil Rights," p. 41.

Ernst, a civil liberties advocate; and Francis P. Matthews of Nevada, the head of the Knights of Columbus.[10]

A report from this group, should the President release it and support it, could mean real political trouble. It would mean that the problems of black Americans would no longer be swept under the rug. The President charged the committee to investigate existing statutes and law enforcement measures at all levels of government and recommend how each might be strengthened.[11] This was the first governmental attempt to determine the status of the Negro and his relationship to the government in the United States, and it made a significant contribution to public opinion on race matters. Thus, as early as December, 1946, there was a strong indication that the President was not going to duck the issue of civil rights. That there were political reasons for this cannot be denied; the Democrats had lost control of Congress in November of 1946, and clearly needed more popular support. But, the important fact is that the President supported civil rights when it was not to the party's advantage or his own. He did this in February, 1948,when he publicly endorsed and recommended the results of his Committee. By 1948, violence in the South had abated and his strong support of the Committee's report was controversial.

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[10]White, A Man Called White, p. 333.

[11]Fishel, Black Americans, p. 78.

The first fact to establish is that, in November, 1946, the Democratic Party was old and tired. Democrats had come to rely heavily on Franklin Roosevelt's coat-tails at election time. The New Dealers had become tainted by holding power too long. The Republican cry "Had Enough?" spoke volumes to those who felt the government was interfering where it had no business. War weariness and self-sacrifice made the American people yearn for a change in leadership. By November, 1946, the Democrats were almost all on the defensive. In the congressional elections, the Republicans were given enough of a majority so that they could attempt to legislate as they wished to solve the country's problems. Congress, led by Robert Taft of Ohio, took off on a course designed to remove price, rent, and food controls in order to allow the economy to function "naturally," as they put it. Republicans wanted to control the labor unions, and the Taft-Hartley Act, passed over the President's veto, did just that. The removal of price controls produced inflation and pinched the pocketbook of every wage earner in America. The Democrats were able to take advantage of this issue in 1948.

After the Democratic setback of 1946, shrewd Democrats were planning changes of tactics and personnel. Robert Hannegan, the Democratic leader of St. Louis who had worked so hard to get Truman the vice presidential nomination

in 1944, had served as chairman of the Democratic National Committee since 1942. He was ill in 1946, understandably suffering from hypertension.[12] Because of this, Hannegan resigned in September, 1947, and J. Howard McGrath took his place. McGrath had been governor of Rhode Island three times and a U.S. Senator. Jack Redding, publicity director of the Democratic National Committee, credited McGrath with having had the faith and enthusiasm for Truman which inspired the party to work for Truman's election in 1948. McGrath was a strong advocate of civil rights and as Solicitor General had stressed the duty of the federal government to protect the voting rights of all citizens.[13]

The vice chairman of the Democratic National Committee, Oscar Ewing, was elevated to director of the Federal Security Agency in August, 1947. His devotion to party and president remained extremely strong and he was responsible for the creation of the "kitchen cabinet," a highly influential group which will be discussed in a later section. Ewing, a Harvard graduate, was deeply committed to the idea of a national public health service and to social and economic security. He was to direct the

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[12]Jack Redding, Inside the Democratic Party (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1958), p. 40.

[13]See above, p. 42.

agency which was the forerunner of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

Gael Sullivan, an Irishman from Rhode Island, was a professor of political science. He had taught at DePaul University in Chicago where he worked with Ed Kelly, the city's Democratic boss.[14] He had served as Hannegan's assistant until Ewing quit, whereupon he became vice chairman of the Democratic National Committee. He was a great believer in party loyalty and helped establish closer working relations between the President and the party organization. The groundwork helped in the 1948 campaign, because the party organization had been sadly neglected during Roosevelt's wartime years. Sullivan was frequently in hot water with the President for his intemperate remarks, but he gave the party new zest and enthusiasm. On "Meet the Press" on March 31, 1947, he chastised Henry Wallace and Senator Claude Pepper of Florida for their criticism of the President's conduct of foreign policy. This public spanking aggravated the two men and incensed the liberals, even though Sullivan himself was considered a liberal. His bluntness many times resulted in bad publicity, but his very contentiousness and partisanship had the effect of creating interest in the party.[15]

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[14] Current Biography, VIII, 1947, pp. 618-620.

[15] Redding, Inside, p. 37.

Sullivan's work within the party was innovative and the party's image was improved by his energetic, exciting style. For example, he started a weekly news letter which lambasted the Republicans. This was handed out to party organizations in the big cities. He also found the money to broadcast a radio hook-up of eight Democratic leaders to discuss Democratic policy.

He had hopes of replacing Chairman Hannegan when he finally retired, but his image was tarnished when he had an auto accident and was accused of drunk driving. Sullivan protested that he had fallen asleep at the wheel in hostile, that is Republican, territory, and the drunk rumor had been a deliberate smear. Though this is probably true, it sounded far-fetched and his reputation was compromised. The job went to McGrath and Sullivan took it gracefully.[16] He continued to contribute suggestions of great value, and as will be explained later, formulated the basic plan on which Truman's 1948 campaign was run.

Another new face appeared in 1947. To most observers, Clark Clifford became the most influential of the President's advisors. Clifford was the nephew of the liberal editor of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.[17] He favored the

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[16]Redding, Inside, p. 90.

[17]Eric Goldman, The Crucial Decade: America, 1945-1955 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 63.

codification of the gains of the New Deal to stop the regression of the Eightieth Congress. As a special counsel to the President, Clifford advised the use of the presidential veto to salvage and protect the New Deal programs that were being attacked. Clifford saw that the problem of the future would be the creation and equitable distribution of abundance. He had the optimistic view that American technology would produce enough for all Americans. The only problem would be to see that everyone got a fair share. The administration, therefore, began to offer a "Fair Deal" to the American people. Like the New Deal, the Fair Deal made some provision for the Negro in its programs, and, advised by a liberal, well-educated group led by Clifford, Truman began to address himself to the special problems which black Americans faced. If the President were thinking of the 1948 campaign as he advocated civil rights, he was also moved by the inequities and unfairness which the Negro faced.

One of the first speeches Truman gave after Clifford joined his staff in the spring of 1947 was to the thirty-eighth annual convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. On June 28, 1947, speaking before the Lincoln Memorial on the stage with Eleanor Roosevelt, Truman pledged vigorous support of civil rights:

> Every man should have a right to a decent home, the right to an education, the right to adequate medical care, the right to a worthwhile job, the right to an equal share in the making of public decisions through the ballot and the right to a fair trial in a fair court. We must insure that these rights--on equal terms--are enjoyed by every citizen.[18]

This is the strongest statement any president had ever addressed directly to Negroes in support of their efforts for equal rights and opportunities.

President Truman was more influenced by the tactical advice from the liberals in his administration than by close ties to the Negro community itself, or by any unified pressure on him to support civil rights from public opinion. "The poor and the blacks do not support liberal policies even in their own interest. Liberalism is found among people with leisure and education," according to Gunnar Myrdal in one of the more memorable statements in his An American Dilemma.[19] This was true in 1947-48 when a group of young liberals, associated with the eastern establishment, gently eased an ex-Missouri county judge into a position of leadership in the matter of civil rights. Their success in winning the President's support and the eventual endorsement of civil rights by the Democratic Party constitutes one of the more interesting political stories of recent times.

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[18] New York Times, June 30, 1947, p. 3.

[19] p. 73.

That there was an unofficial "kitchen cabinet" and that it was openly devoted to liberal policies is freely admitted by those who were members. James McGregor Burns gives a definition of the eastern establishment whose ideas the "kitchen cabinet" espoused:

> The Eastern Establishment . . . came mainly from the larger cities, especially in the northeast; attended old preparatory schools, and Ivy League universities and took on a speech and a set of airs with a slightly alien British tinge; fanned out into law firms and banks and brokerage houses, worked smoothly together in clubs, foundations, and on boards of trustees, read the New York Times or the Herald Tribune or their moderate, internationalist counterparts in Boston, Philadelphis, or a dozen other cities. Experienced in managing or advertising big enterprises, cosmopolitan in their national and international travels and contacts, accustomed in dealing with governmental bureaucracy. . . [20]

These men were becoming part of the federal bureaucracy by joining advisory groups, regulatory agencies, and special investigatory bodies. Though Truman was not at all their kind of person, he followed their judgment on many issues. James Forrestal, Dean Acheson, and George Marshall were examples of this type in the most prominent governmental positions. But in the matter of civil rights, it was the second echelon that exerted its influence.

The "kitchen cabinet" was an informal group of men who met regularly at lunch to discuss the positions they wanted the President to take. They were all liberals and

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[20]Burns, Roosevelt: Soldier of Freedom, p. 38.

they were all concerned that more economic and social help be given by the federal government. They believed that government could alleviate human suffering and were not afraid of the growth of the federal establishment. The originator of the "kitchen cabinet" was Oscar Ewing, who was still vice chairman of the Democratic National Committee when the meetings began. He initiated the meetings after the 1946 elections when it was obvious to him that Truman had not "caught on," as he put it, with the people. "I felt we had to build him up as the champion of various groups," Ewing recalled.[21]

Those attending the luncheon meetings varied from time to time, but the following were the regulars: Leon Keyserling, a member of the Council of Economic Advisors; S. Girard Davidson, an assistant secretary of the Interior; David A. Morse, an assistant secretary of Labor; Charles S. Murphy, an administrative assistant to the President; Charles Brannan, an undersecretary of agriculture; George Elsey, an assistant to Clark Clifford; David Bell of the White House staff; and Clark Clifford. According to Clifford,

> The idea was that the six or eight of us would try to come to an understanding among ourselves on what direction we would like the President to take on any given issue. And then, quietly and unobtrusively, each in his own way, we would try to steer the President in that direction. . . .

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[21]Nichols, Breakthrough, p. 84.

> We were pushing him the other way [away from Taft Conservatism] urging him to boldness and to strike out for new, high ground. He wasn't going to placate that Republican Congress, whatever he did.[22]

These men were extremely influential in shaping the President's Fair Deal, and worked steadily for his re-election in 1948, which they felt depended on his maintaining a liberal image.

Sullivan was pondering campaign strategy during the summer of 1947. On August 19, 1947, he submitted a report to Clifford called Victory in 1948: Precinct to President.[23] In this paper, Sullivan urged that the stress should be on the humanity of the Democratic Party. He urged that the President and the party identify themselves with the "little man" who was worried about prices, housing, employment, illness, and debt. Included definitely in Sullivan's planning was the courtship of the Negro vote; as he noted, the blacks worried about the same things as the white "little man." Sullivan concluded by suggesting that the President should get closer to the people and give informal "off the cuff" speeches. He even suggested a cross-country train trip so that middle America could see and hear the President in person, not as he was pictured in a hostile or indifferent press.

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[22]Cabell Phillips, The Truman Presidency: A History of a Triumphant Succession (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1966), p. 164.

[23]Papers of Clark Clifford, Political File, 1947-48, Box 19, Truman Library.

A final bit of political strategy was determined in November, 1947. Acting upon the suggestions of Sullivan and the "kitchen cabinet," Clifford submitted a confidential memo to the President on his plan to win election in 1948. The plan hinged largely on the issue of civil rights. Clifford wrote that the South could safely be ignored in their objections to federal support of civil rights. He believed the South would not revolt just because the government officially opposed lynchings, poll taxes, and discrimination. Further, he said there was no longer any need to placate southern congressional leaders since they were not supporting Fair Deal legislation anyhow. He believed there was more to be gained by courting other factions whose votes would be won on the basis of liberalism rather than on racism and fiscal conservatism.

The second point of the Clifford memo was that despite the President's troubles with labor, he would be able to gain its support in a national election. His veto of the Tart-Hartley Act and overall record of support for labor would compensate for his tough tactics against the railroad and mine worker unions. The most virulent Truman hater, John L. Lewis of the United Mineworkers Union, had been isolated, and attacking him had not hurt Truman with the rest of labor.[24]

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[24]Clark Clifford to the President, Memo, Papers of Clark Clifford, Political File, Box 21.

The whole theory, therefore, was to develop a more liberal image for the President, not to try to be more conservative than the Republicans. The most important position to take, according to Clifford, was the support of civil rights. Clifford subscribed to a widely popular notion that the Negro vote held the balance of power in the upcoming presidential election.[25] According to this theory, the northern Negro voter held the balance of power because he voted in a bloc, geographically concentrated in pivotal, large, and closely contested electoral states like New York, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan. Clifford's memo stated that the northern Negro knew that he could not get political satisfaction as long as the southern conservatives ran the Democratic Party. Therefore, the President must win the confidence of the Negroes and the liberals by doing more than uttering cynical political promises. He strongly urged the President to take strong action in favor of civil rights.

In the back of Clifford's mind during all this time was the threat of Henry Wallace as a presidential candidate on a third party ticket. On December 16, 1946, after his dismissal by Truman, Wallace became editor of the New Republic. By assuming this position, he had acquired a national magazine as a forum for his ideas. In the main, his articles

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[25]See Henry Moon, Balance of Power: The Negro Vote, 1948.

proposed an end to distrust of the Soviet Union and an end to the building of war material. In his first editorial, he enunciated his program of "Jobs, Peace, and Freedom" to oppose the Tryman-Byrnes policy of armed preparedness. Wallace believed that the way to peace was to abolish such causes of war as starvation and ignorance. The industrial nations must assist the rest of the world by helping them build roads, dams, and irrigation projects. There must be freedom of passage through the Panama and Suez Canals, the Dardanelles, and along the Danube. Middle Eastern oil must be available to everyone. The Jews must have a homeland. In a note of prophecy, Wallace predicted that if the arms race between Russia and the United States continued, the defense department and the large industries would join forces to produce a subtle fascism because this military-industrial complex would control more jobs than any fifty corporations.[26] Just as the "doves" are claiming in 1971, America had problems of housing, crime, pollution, and racism to be solved and had no business wasting money on atomic bombs and arms for Greece and Turkey. These were Wallace's basic positions and they differed from Truman's considerably.

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[26]New Republic, December 16, 1946.

Truman felt Wallace was well-meaning but inexperienced.[27] Truman and Byrnes were well aware of Russia's desire for a buffer zone along her western frontier, but were not willing to sacrifice the national aspirations of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, East Germany, and Yugoslavia to make Russia happy. Consequently, the Americans and the Russians were not reaching agreements to guarantee the peace. Inside the self-proclaimed liberal community, was a group which felt that Truman was inexperienced in international affairs and insensitive to American domestic needs. Therefore, they reasoned, Russian truculence and American domestic unrest were his fault. Wallace was the embodiment of this sentiment.

In December, 1946, some of the disgruntled New Dealers like Guy Tugwell, Chester Bowles, and Leon Henderson joined with Wallace and other "progressives" to form the Progressive Citizens of America.[28] The aim of the organization was to supplant the "pseudo-liberal" Democratic Party with a "truly liberal party." The primary objective of the P.C.A. was to obtain peace with Russia based on "understanding" and compromise, on the assumption that both countries wanted a better life for their citizens. By

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[27]Truman, Memoirs, II, p. 185.

[28]Cited hereinafter as P.C.A.

eliminating the distrust between the two countries, the arms race would end and free vast sums of money to spend on the "common man" and the underdeveloped countries. This was an attractive program, particularly to a war-weary liberal.

At its rallies and meetings, the P.C.A. stressed time after time the understanding of Russia's aims and problems. This led in some cases to laying the entire blame for cold war tensions on Truman and his "hard line" against the expansion of Russia. The Truman Doctrine, by sending arms to Greece and Turkey to suppress Communist insurgency, upset Wallace and the P.C.A. since it once again meant an increase in militarism. The Marshall Plan was more to their liking, but was still criticized for its aim--to stop the spread of Communism. Eventually, it dawned on many liberals that the Russians were being difficult themselves and that good intentions did not necessarily bring peace. Certain members of the P.C.A. became objects of suspicion because of their seeming approbation of all things Russian, and a split developed between those who were either Communists or were overly sympathetic to all things Communist, and the liberals who rejected Communism as an oppressive, totalitarian system. The anti-Communist liberals formed the Americans for Democratic Action[29] to preserve the reputation of liberalism and to keep liberals free of suspicion by the

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[29]Cited hereinafter as the A.D.A.

red baiters.[30] The A.D.A., as will be seen later, had considerable influence on the leaders of the Democratic Party and played a significant role in making civil rights a part of the 1948 party platform.

Besides the challenge from the left as represented by the P.C.A., the President was also faced with renewed demands by Negroes themselves for more attention to civil rights. They dramatized their cause by delivering a petition to the United Nations on October 23, 1947. In the petition the NAACP prayed for relief from the discrimination suffered by Negroes in the United States.[31] This move was not unprecedented. William Monroe Trotter, leader of the National Equal Rights League in the 1920's, had taken a job as a ship's waiter to get to Europe to present the American Negro's case before the League of Nations. The preface of the document submitted to the United Nations, written by W.E.B. DeBois, eloquently revealed the hypocrisy of the United States' preaching democracy and freedom while denying fundamental rights to American Negroes.[32] The Soviet Union proposed making a crime of the "advocacy of national, racial and religious hostility or of national exclusiveness or hatred and

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[30]Schmidt, Quixote Crusade, p. 28.

[31]Moon, Balance of Power, p. 203.

[32]Ottley, New World, p. 38.

contempt as well as any action establishing privilege or discrimination based on distinctions of race, nationality, or religion [sic]."[33] The treatment of the Negro had become embarrassing internationally,and Britain and France were indignant that the United States could lecture them on colonialism while treating black Americans far worse than they treated colonials.[34]

The high point of civil rights in 1947 was the delivery of the report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights. The President allowed it to be made public on October 27, 1947.[35] The report was specific and precise and even Walter White praised it as, "an almost perfect yardstick . . . by which can be measured the gap between what Americans say they believe and what they do."[36] The committee specified four rights to which they said all Americans are entitled: (1) the right to safety or security of person, (2) the right to citizenship and its privileges, (3) the right to freedom of conscience and expression, (4) the right to equality of opportunity.[37] Not only did

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[33]Moon, Balance of Power, p. 203.

[34]Ottley, Black Odyssey, p. 311.

[35]Berman, "The Politics of Civil Rights," p. 1.

[36]White, A Man Called White, p. 333.

[37]To Secure These Rights: The Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights (Washington, D. C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947), p. 6.

the committee define these rights, but spelled out with details, garnered from witnesses under oath, the way in which these rights were abridged in the United States. They pointed out that the South in particular obstructed rights of Negroes, and came out strongly against lynching.[38] The conclusion of the report was a list of changes which could be made to protect the rights of all citizens equally. Briefly, the report urged: (1) that the Civil Rights section in the Justice Department be strengthened and that the F.B.I. and state and local authorities establish civil rights sections, (2) that civil rights commissions be established at the national, state, and local levels, (3) that police forces be professionalized, (4) that federal laws protecting personal safety be strengthened, (5) that an anti-lynch law be enacted by Congress, (6) that the Thirteenth Amendment forbidding involuntary servitude be enforced, (7) that the claims of Japanese Americans detained in camps during World War II be reviewed and processed, (8) that the poll tax be ended, (9) that voting abuses in party primaries be ended, (10) that discrimination in the Armed Services be ended, (11) that legislation to control excessive influence of special interest groups in all levels of government be enacted, (12) that segregation be eliminated, (13) that a permanent

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[38] Ibid., p. 23.

FEPC be established, (14) that equality of education, health, and housing be guaranteed, and (15) that a program of education to end prejudice be initiated.

Perhaps the feature of the report that caused the most turmoil was its specific mention of the South. In some cases the names of both cities and states were given, and even law officials were mentioned by name. This tore away the curtain of anonymity behind which the South had hidden its worst offenders. The report logically and unemotionally exposed the fear and violence used to keep Negroes "in their place."

Most Southerners were outraged that the report was made public; they assumed that the President would have to repudiate the work of the committee if he intended to be nominated by the Democratic Party. Those most disturbed, like Strom Thurmond and Lister Hill, believed that the Southern delegates could deny the nomination to the President. The rabid racists predicted violence and civil war if the report were adopted. In the South, visions of doom and destruction appeared to otherwise responsible newspapers and leaders. In the midst of the fury, President Truman remained unperturbed. He let the nation know what was on his mind in his State of the Union message on January 7, 1948. He announced his support of the Committee's findings and his

intention to deliver a special message to Congress on February 2, on the matter of civil rights.[39]

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[39]Bernstein, Ambiguous Legacy, p. 14.

THE EXECUTIVE ACTS ON CIVIL RIGHTS

The Adoption of Civil Rights by the Democratic Party

When President Truman announced his support of the Civil Rights committee's report, he was criticized for making a political maneuver to win the Negro vote. Supposedly, his endorsement of civil rights legislation was a desperate attempt to win the approval of liberals and Negroes who were following Wallace; at this time the P.C.A. was drawing strong support from these two groups.[1] According to this theory, Truman endorsed civil rights at a time when he was very low in the public opinion polls and was trying to regain popularity. Political expediency called for him to keep discreet silence, as some party officials urged.[2] In fact, the President was getting high ratings in October-November, 1947. The papers showed growing support for Truman during the summer of 1947. Primarily, people were pleased with his success in handling John L. Lewis. Both the Gallup and Roper Polls showed Truman strength.[3]

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[1]Bernstein, Ambiguous Legacy, p. 14.

[2]Bush, "The Truman Civil Rights Program," p. 36.

[3]Newspaper clippings, Papers of Clark Clifford, Political File 1947-48, Box 19. No one seems to make the claim that if the President had not endorsed his committee, that that would have been political too.

But by March 8, 1948, his stock was very low, indicating that he had hurt himself by taking a stand because of principle. Jack Redding, publicity director for the National Committee, stated flatly that presidential support of the report had hurt politically more than it had helped.[4] The Washington Post concurred:

> The Democrats have been advancing with their wings in the air. Now they are gravely imperiled on each flank. To the left harassed by Wallace and his pinkcoated partisans. To the right they are not only menaced by the heavy dragoons of Big Business in cuirasses of gleaming gold and bristling plumes fashioned from the stubs of innumerable checkbooks, by isolationist ambushes and by the Parthian warrior of fanatical constitutionalists; they are also threatened with the defection of some of their own best-disciplined and hitherto most dependable troops, namely the Southern Democrats.[5]

The charge that the President's support of civil rights was motivated solely by politics is unfounded, but there was a political strategy behind his speech on February 2, when he requested legislation to effect some of the reforms suggested by the committee.

Clark Clifford had made his position on civil rights known in his memo to the President in November, 1947. He publicly urged the President to adopt the committee's report as his own.[6] He reported that although the polls kept dropping,

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[4]Redding, Inside the Democratic Party, p. 133.

[5]Quoted in ibid., p. 153.

[6]Bush, "The Truman Civil Rights Program," p. 31.

supposedly because of his stand on civil rights, the letters to the President were five to one in favor of his stand.[7] Further, Clifford told the President that he must offer more than political promises to the Negro to get his vote. As mentioned, Clifford did not believe that the South would completely repudiate the Democratic Party, mainly because of tradition. Also, the South had its share of decent men who hopefully could drown out the extremists. In addition, the southern leadership in Congress was loath to surrender its power in Congress by following another party. In the end, Truman got more votes in the South than Thurmond and Dewey.[8] Clifford's conviction was reinforced by his aide, George M. Elsey, who wrote Clifford that "the Negro votes in the crucial states will more than cancel out any votes he [Truman] may lose in the South."[9] Hopefully, endorsing civil rights would only drive the worst bigots out of the Democratic Party while winning support from groups that were skeptical of Truman's liberalism. As will be seen later, the support of civil rights did not help measurably in assuring the support of the liberals, at least for his nomination.

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[7]Davis, "A Study of Federal Civil Rights Program," p. 91.

[8]William G. Carleton, "The Fate of Our Fourth Party, Yale Review, Spring, 1949, p. 455.

[9]Campaign Material 1948, Papers of Clark Clifford, Political File, Box 20.

After the President made a strong speech on civil rights in February, the Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, J. Howard McGrath, met with Southern governors on February 23 to listen to their demands. Jack Redding suggested a compromise to McGrath in a pre-meeting caucus and was told, "there'll be no compromise. No compromise. As chairman, I'm not going to push this thing one spot further than the President's message. But neither will I withdraw one inch from the confines of that message."[10] The governors protested and threatened but the party leadership did not give an inch. Thus the Democratic Party was committed to a calculated risk: take an unpopular but principled position and hope for rewards at election time.

The Democrats took this chance on the basis of analysis by a small "think tank" which had been established at the suggestion of Oscar Ewing. Under the leadership of William Batt, Jr., a Research Division of the Democratic National Committee was created. Batt, the son of a Philadelphia industrialist, had served as vice chairman of the War Production Board. He was also the leader of the A.D.A. in Philadelphia.[11] Beginning at the first of January, 1948, Batt gathered a group to supply the "kitchen cabinet" liberals

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[10]Redding, Inside, p. 134.

[11]New York Times Magazine, August 1, 1948, E-5.

with ideas and information. The President knew of the group and approved.[12]

The first discussions along this line were mainly between Batt, Ewing, and Clifford, and they came to several conclusions. They felt the President should take the offensive early, and attack the record of the Republican Congress. The State of the Union speech was the first step in the direction of a reawakened Democratic Party. The consensus of the group was that Dewey would be the Republican nominee and that he had a fairly liberal record as the governor of New York; he had created a state FEPC, hired blacks, sponsored aid to education, and was hailed as incorruptible.[13] But the Republican Congress had given the Democrats a great deal to campaign on. They could blame Congress for failure to stop inflation, for blocking housing construction, for promoting tax cuts for the rich, for high prices and the end of price controls, for cutting funds for school lunches and FEPC, for Taft-Hartley, and for catering to the rich.[14] After the President's speech on civil rights, the Republicans could also be blamed for blocking civil rights legislation.

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[12]William L. Batt Interview, July 26, 1966, Transcript, Truman Library, p. 1.

[13]"Editorial," Crisis, January, 1948.

[14]Peel, The 1948 Preconvention Campaign," Annals, p. 79.

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[12]William L. Batt Interview, July 26, 1966, Transcript, Truman Library, p. 1.

[13]"Editorial," Crisis, January, 1948.

[14]Peel, The 1948 Preconvention Campaign," Annals, p. 79.

All of this was a handy campaign position; the President could endorse and propose legislation which he knew would not pass, and then "give 'em hell" when nothing was done by that "no good, do-nothing, Eightieth Congress." It was beautiful in its simplicity.

The President wanted the campaign fought entirely on domestic issues since foreign policy was a bipartisan effort. Actually, in foreign affairs the Congress had a rather good record and the Democrats could not take sole credit for that.[15] Also, domestic affairs traditionally had been more important in national elections than foreign affairs. So, while Dewey was campaigning for the nomination with his efficient, well-oiled organization, the Democrats were preparing to strap all the Republican troglodytes to his back and make him carry the onus of their actions.

The first person Batt approached for the "think tank" was Kenneth Birkhead, son of Dr. L. M. Birkhead, the executive director of the Friends of Democracy.[16] Birkhead was chosen because he and his father were active in the NAACP.[17] The Friends of Democracy did research into anti-democratic propaganda. Batt, knowing Birkhead's specialized knowledge of

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[15]Batt Interview, p. 12.

[16]New York Times Magazine, August 1, 1948, E-5.

[17]Batt Interview, p. 28.

fringe groups, felt he would be useful in combatting Henry Wallace's movement. Said Birkhead:

> I originally was contacted by Batt, who is a longtime friend of mine because it appeared early in the year [1948] that the Wallace movement--the Progressive Party, was going to be a major problem in the campaign and that it had a lot of extreme left-wingers in the country associated with it. . . . [18]

Other men were added and contributed their expertise. Johannes Hoeber had been in charge of labor relations for the Philadelphia Community Chest. Philip Dreyer came from Oregon and had served with Batt on the American Veterans Committee. David Lloyd was an A.D.A. lawyer and later became the executive director of the Truman Library Corporation. Frank Kelly of Kansas City, was a newspaperman and Nieman Fellow. He later became vice president of the Robert Hutchins group, the Center for Democratic Studies,in California. Finally, to do the more menial tasks, was John Barriere, a recent college graduate.[19]

The group was basically a research team to provide information to the President. The National Committee was not very impressed with the Research Division and McGrath felt they were "ivory tower."[20] The group made itself felt

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[18]Kenneth M. Birkhead Interview, July 17, 1966, Transcript, Truman Library, p. 2.

[19]Ibid., pp. 1-3.

[20]Ibid., p. 13.

mainly through Charles Murphy, administrative assistant to Clark Clifford, both of whom were involved with the presidential campaign at the White House.[21] Birkhead worked with Philleo Nash, another presidential advisor, on civil rights.[22] They all favored taking a positive approach to civil rights and Birkhead reported:

> The President consciously made a decision that he was not going to win that election by being anti-civil rights; that he wasn't going to get the vote of the people in the South by coming out against civil rights. . . .
> . . . . . .
> I personally thought the Negro vote could make the difference because I thought this [election] was going to be a squeaker.[23]

Birkhead urged that the President campaign especially hard in New York and Pennsylvania and that he talk not only about civil rights, but about black housing and jobs.[24]

The entire Democratic campaign was given a jolt on February 17, 1948, when Leo Isaacson, the P.C.A. candidate for a vacant congressional seat in the Bronx, won the election. After studying the results of the election, Oscar Ewing came to the conclusion that the Negro vote would go 20-30% to Wallace in New York in the November election. To

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[21] Ibid., p. 14.

[22] Ibid., p. 18.

[23] Ibid., pp. 19-22.

[24] Ibid.

stop this drift, the Democrats had to get a Negro campaign organizer, feed more material into the Negro press, and secure executive orders to establish an FEPC for the Executive Branch and to end discrimination in the Armed Services.[25] Wallace was also making inroads into the Negro vote in the South. Elmo Roper, the pollster, reported that a Negro sample taken mainly in the South found 24% of Negroes would vote for Wallace, and 4% of the whites would. Specifically, 29% of the Negroes interviewed liked Wallace most for his program of racial equality.[26] The P.C.A. called for an end to segregation of any minority anywhere under the American flag.[27]

The blacks were disappointed with Truman because he had come out strongly in February and then had fallen silent. The immediate complaint was that he did not eliminate segregation in the armed forces by executive order as commander-in-chief. Instead there were lengthy meetings between Negro leaders and the administration. Truman met with A. Philip Randolph and Grant Reynolds who threatened civil disobedience if no action were taken. They testified before the Armed

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[25]Bill Batt to Gael Sullivan, April 20, 1948, "The Negro Vote," Papers of Clark Clifford, Political File, Box 21.

[26]Elmo Roper to Dr. Herbert Hyman, April 5, 1948, "The Wallace Vote and the 1948 Elections, ibid.

[27]Goldman, Rendezvous, p. 417.

Services committees of both houses. Roy Wilkins and Lester Granger met with the Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, on April 26, 1948. Forrestal, a backer of the Urban League, had begun to integrate the lily-white Navy during World War II.[28] The Air Force had been cooperative under the leadership of Stuart Symington. But the Army under Secretary Kenneth Royall, a southerner, resisted integration.[29] Royall said publicly that the Army was no place for social experimentation and he received no executive reprimand.[30] There was further criticism of the administration because it did not push a government policy to combat discrimination in its own civil service and because there was a reduction in the budget of the Criminal Division of the Department of Justice which contained the Civil Rights Section.[31] Obviously, the President was walking a thin line by taking a firm stand on civil rights, then lying low to avoid complaints that he had gone too far--and that he had not gone far enough. There was no way to please both extreme wings of the Democratic Party.

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[28]Nichols, Breakthrough, p. 61.

[29]Crisis, May, 1948.

[30]Bush, "The Truman Civil Rights Program," p. 45.

[31]Ibid.

Strangely enough, after Truman announced his intention to seek nomination on March 23, 1948, the liberal wing and the southern wing of the Democratic Party temporarily joined forces. Labor leaders and the northern bosses were the first to desert the President. They were convinced that Truman was a loser, and neither group could afford to be caught supporting a loser. Dave Beck of the Teamsters Union even came out as a Republican.[32] The South had been disaffected since the appointment of the Committee on Civil Rights. Although it had been proved that great generals do not necessarily make great presidents, Dwight Eisenhower made an irresistible candidate. Both parties tried to get him to announce his candidacy. But Eisenhower had promised Truman he did not want political office. Eisenhower's disavowals did not deter the Draft Eisenhower Committee which featured such figures as James Roosevelt, leader of the movement, and Chester Bowles, Leon Henderson, Claude Pepper and Hubert Humphrey representing the A.D.A. wing of the Democratic Party. From the big cities were bosses Jake Arvey of Cook County, Illinois, Paul O'Dwyer of New York, Ed Flynn of the Bronx, and Bill Lawrence of Philadelphia. Joining this already odd combination were such southern luminaries as Strom Thurmond, Lister Hill, Richard

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[32]Redding, Inside, p. 156.

Russell, and John Stennis.[33] United by their dislike of Truman, this group kept the papers filled with Eisenhower headlines. They were undeterred by the fact that they had no idea what Eisenhower's political views were.[34]

In March, the President's stock was at an all-time low point.[35] James Roosevelt had embarrassed Howard McGrath the previous month at the Jefferson-Jackson dinner in California by standing up and endorsing Eisenhower. Poor planning spoiled the surprise, however; long-winded after-dinner speakers droned on until 2 a.m., dampening Eisenhower enthusiasm.[36] Wallace forces seemed to be riding high; the South was openly hostile to the President. March, not April, was the cruelest month.

On March 12, the President enjoyed one small break. The Russians invaded Czechoslovakia and this justified Truman's tough policy toward the Russians.[37] It undermined

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[33]Jules Abels, Out of the Jaws of Victory (New York: Henry Holt, 1959), p. 73.

[34]Clifton Brock, Americans for Democratic Action: Its Role in National Politics (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1962), p. 92.

[35]"Editorial," Washington Post, March 8, 1948.

[36]Redding, Inside, p. 162.

[37]Berman, "The Politics of Civil Rights," p. 85.

Wallace's position of conciliation and when some of the P.C.A. defended the Soviet Union, they increased the suspicion that there were many communists within the party. More liberals, men who genuinely admired Wallace, sadly left the P.C.A. because of its pro-Russian cast.[38] The Negro press had held back from endorsing Wallace all this time, although he was the "sentimental favorite," and "straight on the question." But his record was not perfect. He had kept the Department of Commerce segregated and had refused to speak at NAACP meetings.[39] The dire results of his agricultural policies have already been discussed. This rather cool appraisal of Wallace by the Negro press prevented the P.C.A. from gaining an overwhelming lead in the black areas, and Truman was able to counter its promises with executive action once he won the nomination.

The real initiative was seized when the President took a "leisurely, non-political" trip across the country. Party funds were in such short supply in June, 1948, that the party could not pay for the President's travel. Luckily, the University of California at Berkeley invited the President to speak at commencement and to receive an honorary

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[38] New York Times, July 8, 1948, p. 13.

[39] Crisis, February, 1948.

degree,[40] thus enabling him to cross the country on an official function. On June 3, the train left Washington and the first speech Truman delivered indicated that some changes had been made. The President had had an unfortunate speech style before then, relying on speeches written by a staff and cabinet still accustomed to penning lofty phrases that would have been far more appropriate to Roosevelt. These long, florid speeches fell flat when pronounced in Truman's midwestern twang. Obviously, the phrases were not his. He had experimented with a new style in a Young Democrats speech in May and it had been warmly received.[41] The new style allowed the President more freedom to form his own phrases and deliver "off the cuff" remarks. William Batt and his Research Division began supplying the President with material boiled out of lengthy statistics and put into digestible, understandable form.[42] Instead of fully written speeches, the President was given an outline of facts, local color, and local issues. He then put them into his own words. By the time he returned to Washington on June 18, the people of the United States had heard their President and were responding warmly. The train trip was an idea claimed

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[40]Alfred Steinberg, The Man from Missouri (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1962), p. 311. It is interesting to speculate on this invitation. Ed Pauley, party treasurer, had resigned, and returned to California, but he was still aware of party finances, loyal to Truman, and influential.

[41]Batt Interview, p. 12.

[42]Birkhead Interview, p. 308.

by Gael Sullivan and Jack Redding, and it was used in the campaign later with great effectiveness.[43]

The Republicans met for their convention on June 20 in Philadelphia. Thomas Dewey of New York and Earl Warren of California were nominated. Warren was a valuable addition because he had a good liberal reputation as governor of California. The Republicans not only wrote a fairly strong civil rights plank into their platform, but also came out against lynching, the poll tax, and racial segregation in the armed forces.[44] As mentioned, Dewey, as governor of New York, had a fairly strong civil rights record, having established a state FEPC and appointed Negroes to policy making positions.[45]

The Progressive Party convention was a novelty of the first order. Many artists and artistic types had joined the party, and the convention was planned by experts in theatrical production. Lights and action differentiated the P.C.A. from the other party conventions. Charles P. Howard, a Negro, gave the keynote address.[46] The platform

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[43]Redding, Inside, p. 52.

[44]Berman, "The Politics of Civil Rights," p. 95.

[45]Crisis, January, 1948.

[46]Lionel V. Patenaude, "The Presidential Election of 1948 from a Contemporary Point of View," unpublished thesis from the University of Texas, 1949, Truman Library.

opposed segregation anywhere under the American flag.[47] Senator Glen Taylor of Idaho, an eccentric cowboy singer, was chosen as vice presidential nominee. He had been arrested in Birmingham, Alabama, for using the "colored entrance" of the auditorium where he was speaking and he and Wallace had regularly refused to speak to segregated audiences.[48] The highlight was Wallace's nomination and acceptance speech, carefully orchestrated for the optimum effect. In his speech he took his usual strong stand in favor of civil rights and called for the "second emancipation" of the Negro. As minimum goals, he declared that lynching and the poll tax must end.[49] The "new party" was able to formulate a liberal platform since there were no conservatives or racists with political power who had to be placated. The Democrats and the Republicans were not so lucky.

When the Democrats gathered in Philadelphia, the party was still badly split. General Eisenhower had finally refused to consider a draft as presidential nominee on July 6.[50] The stop-Truman forces then turned to Supreme Court

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[47]Goldman, Rendezvous, p. 417.

[48]Newsweek, XXXI, May 10, 1948, p. 24.

[49]New York Times, July 25, 1948, p. 36.

[50]New York Times, July 6, 1948.

Justice William O. Douglas, who refused on the grounds that he would not use the Court as a stepping stone to the presidency.[51] Claude Pepper of Florida offered himself, but by this time the city bosses were abandoning the lost cause, the liberals were feeling embarrassed, and the revolt was over. Meanwhile, the liberals and Southerners were at each others' throats and determined to drive each other out of the party.

Nowhere was the animosity stronger than in the platform committee. Clark Clifford, Bill Batt, and Jack Redding had all had a hand in drafting the platform. Clark Clifford's draft of the civil rights plank read:

> We assert our conviction that no nation can flourish which condemns any of its peoples to second class citizenship or which tolerates discrimination on the basis of race, religion, color or national origin. We favor legislation, recommended by President Truman, by which the Federal Government will exercise its full constitutional power to assure that due process, the right to vote, the right to live, and the right to work shall not turn on any consideration of race, religion, color, or national origin.[52]

The final draft which was submitted to the full committee, after thorough discussion of political expediency read:

> We again state our belief that racial and religious minorities must have the right to live, the right to work, the right to vote,

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[51]Brock, Americans for Democratic Action, pp. 94-95.

[52]Papers of George Elsey, Speech File, June 4-November 24, 1948, 1948 Presidential Campaign (July), Box 8, p. 17.

> the full and equal protection of the laws, on a basis of equality with all citizens as guaranteed by the Constitution.[53]

Other presidential advisors decided that the Clifford version was too strong and specific. They also believed, as the President well knew, that the party platforms were always vague and had little political value. He saw no reason to antagonize a faction of the party over one section of the platform. The South was willing to compromise by putting in the 1944 civil rights plank plus an equally vague states' rights plank. The 1944 civil rights plank read as follows:

> We believe that racial and religious minorities have the right to live, develop and vote equally with all citizens and share the rights that are guaranteed by our Constitution. Congress should exert its full powers to protect those rights.[54]

Obviously, the administration was trying to patch up relations with the South, since the plank submitted by the administration to the platform committee was even weaker than the 1944 plank which the South was willing to accept; the administration draft did not mention any action by Congress and the 1944 civil rights plank does. Of course in 1944, there was no full program of civil rights before Congress as there was in 1948.

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[53] Ibid., p. 12.

[54] New York Times, July 3, 1948, p. 9.

There were those who were determined to prevent compromise with the South on civil rights. Though the moderates were in control of the platform machinery, debate and hot discussion took place in the platform subcommittee. Senator Francis J. Myers of Pennsylvania was chairman of the platform committee and Senator Scott Lucas of Illinois was chairman of the subcommittee which considered civil rights. On the subcommittee were Hubert H. Humphrey of Minnesota, Esther Murray of California, and Andrew J. Biemiller of Wisconsin, who was running for Congress.[55] At hearings on civil rights held July 9, 1948, Guy R. Brewer of New York, a lobbyist for civil rights, warned the subcommittee that "if the Democrats pussy foot on civil rights as the Republicans did, our people will cry 'a plague on both your houses' and flock to the new party."[56] Walter White, as a spokesman for twenty-one Negro organizations with 6,084,000 members, wanted to know if the Democratic Party would continue to be dominated by bigots. He claimed to have three million voters who wanted an end to lynchings, poll taxes, discrimination in the armed forces and in transportation, and equality in education and employment. Roy Wilkins, as chairman of the executive committee of the National Council for a Permanent FEPC, also spoke for his group's interests.

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[55] New Republic, July 26, 1948, pp. 10-11.

[56] New York Times, July 9, 1948, p. 7.

Despite the eloquence of the Negro speakers, the moderates who wanted to placate both sides prevailed. The eighteen-member platform drafting subcommittee drew up the following:

> The Democratic Party is responsible for the great civil rights gains made in recent years in eliminating unfair and illegal discrimination based on race, creed, or color.
>
> The Democratic Party commits itself to continuing its efforts to eradicate all racial, religious, and economic discrimination.
>
> We again state our belief that racial and religious minorities must have the right to live, the right to work, and the right to vote, the full and equal protection of the laws, on a basis of equality with all citizens as guaranteed by the Constitution.[57]

Hubert Humphrey, Esther Murray, and Andres Biemiller drew up two amendments to make the plank more meaningful:

> We highly commend President Harry S Truman for his courageous stand on the issue of civil rights.
>
> We call upon the Congress to support our President in guaranteeing these basic and fundamental American Principles: (1) the right to full and equal political participation; (2) the right to equal opportunity of employment; (3) the right of security of person; (4) and the right of equal treatment in the service and defense of our nation.[58]

The elders of the party opposed a strong plank, feeling that it was sure to split the party and cause the Democrats

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[57]Harry S Truman, Address and Messages, ed. M.B. Schnapped, (Washington, D. C.: Public Affairs Press, 1949), p. 198.

[58]Ibid.

to lose in November.[59] The amendments were voted down by the subcommittee, so when the majority plank was submitted to the full platform committee, Humphrey and the other liberals, all members of the A.D.A., submitted their amendments as a minority report. The whole committee, under Myers' leadership, rejected the amendments in a bitter fight. Humphrey announced that he would take the minority report to the convention floor. Scott Lucas of Illinois declared that the A.D.A. was trying to destroy the party,[60] and called Humphrey a "pipsqueak."[61] The amendments were voted down in full committee 70-30.[62] But a floor fight was imminent.

The men in control of the convention, Truman's supporters, were moderates who represented the center of the party. Like Sam Rayburn, the permanent chairman, they were committed to holding the party together as an effective working organization in both the North and South.[63]

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[59]Hubert H. Humphrey, Beyond Civil Rights: A New Way of Equality (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 31.

[60]Brock, Americans for Democratic Action, p. 97.

[61]Humphrey, Beyond, p. 32.

[62]Ibid.

[63]Paul T. David, Ralph M. Goldman, Richard C. Bain, The Politics of National Party Conventions (Menasha, Wisconsin: The Brookings Institute, 1960), p. 6..

The men who managed Truman's nomination were not the men who pushed for a strong civil rights plank, but there was a high correlation between those who supported the civil rights amendment and those who voted for Truman on the first ballot.[64] Truman's good friend Leslie Biffle was the sergeant at arms; he doled out the tickets and prevented any anti-Truman demonstrations.[65] The delegates were mainly lawyers, judges, realtors, and other non-salaried types.[66] One important segment of the Democratic Party, labor officials, was conspicuously absent. Over all the conventioneers there was a feeling of gloom and defeatism.

The opening-day proceedings began miserably. The "Star Spangled Banner," sung by Lawrence Tibbetts, was pitched so high he sounded as though he were strangling. Van Heflin tried to deliver an eulogy to the war dead above the talking and laughter of conventioneers who could not hear what he was trying to do. Finally, the eulogy ended with the playing of "Taps"--off key.[67] Keynoter Alben Barkley helped revive spirits with one of his typically

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[64]Gerald Pomper, Nominating the President: The Politics of Convention Choice (Chicago: Northwestern Press, 1963) p. 82.

[65]Steinberg, The Man from Missouri, p. 315.

[66]David et al., The Politics, p. 337.

[67]Newsweek, July 26, 1948.

partisan, round-house speeches. He made no special plea for or against civil rights, and hoped that party loyalty would help everyone forgive and forget. He quoted Jefferson, saying "all men are created equal," then applied it largely to foreign countries.[68] The closest he came to civil rights was in saying that there certainly was equality of black and white, red and yellow--not equality of physical, moral, financial, social or intellectual standing--but the equality of right to "enjoy the blessings of free government" in which all may participate and to which they all "have given their consent."[69] Though he drew a pitiful picture of the war-torn refugees, he did not mention the Negro.

The attempt at restoring unity by McGrath, Barkley, and Rayburn was demolished the next day by a black delegate, George Vaughn of Missouri. Vaughn filed a minority report to the report of the credentials committee which had accepted the Mississippi delegation. Vaughn pointed out that at their convention on June 22, the Mississippi Democrats had voted to walk out if the platform did not guarantee states' rights and Truman did not drop civil rights.[70] This was the

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[68]Democratic Party National Convention, Proceedings, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1948, University of Michigan Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan, Microfilm 3061 (3), p. 45.

[69]Ibid.

[70]Ibid., p. 103.

first mention of civil rights on the floor. Further, he stated, the Mississippi delegation was not bound to support Truman if he were nominated, or any other candidate who accepted a civil rights program.[71] Vaughn and the minority recommended that the Mississippi delegation not be seated. This was signed by Vaughn, Adlai E. Stevenson of Illinois, Charles E. Misner of Michigan, Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota, W. T. Thompson of Nebraska, Thomas E. Delahanty of Maine, and Mrs. H. W. Sawyer of Nevada.[72]

With the convention in an uproar, Vaughn gave a passionate defense of Truman's civil rights program, citing the need to end lynching, poll taxes, and to grant equal employment opportunities, inter-state travel without discrimination, and equal educational opportunities.[73] He used the Thirteenth and Fourteenth amendments as the justification for full civil rights, and pointedly noted that there were fifteen million Negroes in America who were gaining their voting rights.

In voting whether to accept the minority report of the credentials subcommittee, Barkley insisted on a voice vote and declared the minority report defeated. Illinois,

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid., p. 105.

New York, and California all insisted that the record show that they had supported the minority report.[74] Later, at their own insistence, Connecticut, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Washington, Wisconsin, and Washington, D. C. were added to the list of those who had supported the minority report. This was a significant grouping of states in that it roughly paralleled the voting in November. Truman did win the midwestern states by being liberal, much to the surprise of the Republicans.

Wright Morrow from the Texas delegation delivered a minority report calling for the restoration of the two-thirds majority necessary for nominating a presidential candidate. This was offered in the hope that Truman's nomination could be blocked. Oscar Ewing, who attended the convention as a New York delegate, fought against the motion successfully.[75] Claude Pepper of Florida supported the return to the two-thirds rule, probably because he still hoped to be a dark horse nominee. It was clear that those who continued to advocate a return to the two-thirds rule wanted to regain veto power over the bulk of the party.[76]

On the night of July 13, the liberal forces had an all night meeting, presided over by A.D.A. president Leon Henderson.

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[74] Ibid., p. 107.

[75] Ibid., p. 109.

[76] David et al., The Politics, p. 213.

When they realized they could not block the nomination of Truman, the liberals decided to channel their efforts to secure a firm plank on civil rights in the party platform. Humphrey had tried to convince the platform committee and failed. Now, since Andrew Biemiller had agreed to submit the minority report to the floor of the convention, they had to organize support to get their report adopted.[77] Once again, as in the Draft Eisenhower movement, there was a coalition of city bosses and liberals. Humphrey admits that Ed Flynn, boss of the Bronx, urged him to go ahead with the floor fight. Flynn promised him the support of New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois.[78] This community of interest existed because the big city politicians were acutely aware of the power of the Negro vote in the cities. The Negro vote in the big northern cities, if delivered, could win the November election. What some liberals were supporting for humanitarian reasons made good political sense. As Oscar Ewing, who studied the value of the Negro vote carefully, said in opposing a return to the two-thirds rule, "We can't sacrifice principle to placate the South."[79] He left unsaid what he had written previously to Bill Batt,

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[77]Brock, Americans for Democratic Action, p. 97.

[78]Humphrey, Beyond, p. 39.

[79]Democratic Proceedings, p. 116.

"The Democrats can't win the election without the vote of the northern Negro."[80] Politics and principles are often quite compatible.

At the fifth session of the convention on July 14, the platform committee made its report. Francis Myers made the report on civil rights, which read:

> We again state our belief that racial and religious minorities must have the right to live, the right to work, the right to vote, and the full and equal protection of the laws, on a basis of equality with all citizens as guaranteed by the Constitution.[81]

The states' righters spoke first and gave their minority report. Dan Moody of Texas read the report which emphasized the power and independence of the states, and Cecil Sims of Tennessee and Walter Sillers of Mississippi seconded the report.

The pro-civil rights minority report, with its endorsement of President Truman and the Civil Rights Committee, was read by Andrew Biemiller on behalf of himself, Humphrey, and Esther Murray. In the heated debate that followed, Maurice J. Tobin of Massachusetts urged that the platform be left alone. Next Hubert Humphrey stood to speak for the adoption of the Biemiller report. He said that the world

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[80]Bill Batt to Gael Sullivan, April 20, 1948, "The Negro Vote," Papers of Clark Clifford, Political File, Box 20.

[81]Democratic Proceedings, p. 176.

was being challenged by slavery and that the United States must be in a morally sound position. He insisted that there could be no double standard in the United States.

> I say this, that the time has arrived in America for the Democratic Party to get out of the shadow of states' rights and walk forth rightly into the sunshine of human rights.[82]

Aaron L. Jacoby, another New York delegate, seconded Humphrey and said there was no more need for states' rights; that the need was to end discriminatory practices against anyone.[83] The speeches were given a dramatic ending by the Honorable James M. Curley of Boston who stood to toast the Irish.[84]

Moody's states' rights report was defeated 309-925. When it was time to vote on the Biemiller report, the chairman of the California delegation, John F. Shelly, stood and requested a roll call. The required one-fifth of the convention agreed, and the roll of the states began. Those delegations whose majority voted "yea" were California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin,

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[82] Ibid., p. 191.

[83] Ibid., p. 193.

[84] Ibid., p. 194.

Wyoming, Washington, D. C., Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The final tally was 651-1/2 yeas and 582-1/2 nays. The A.D.A. civil rights plank had passed.[85]

The voting showed the strength of opinion of big city bosses and the midwest. The Illinois delegation was split by the issue, and Jack Arvey and Ed Kelly seized control of the delegation from moderate Scott Lucas.[86] The bosses of Chicago and Cook County knew the political price they would pay if they did not support civil rights. David Lawrence of Philadelphia, Frank Hague of Jersey City, William O'Dwyer of New York, and, of course, Ed Flynn of the Bronx lent their support. South Dakota was carried by idealism and their delegation leader, Hubert Humphrey's father.[87] Paul Douglas of Chicago began the demonstration after the Humphrey speech. According to Humphrey, the vote signified a new commitment; he pointed out that there was no political gain for states like Minnesota, Wisconsin, and South Dakota for there were few Negroes in these states.[88] This is precisely why the midwestern and western states could be so moralistic about civil rights.

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[85] Ibid., p. 210.

[86] New Republic, July 26, 1948, pp. 10-11.

[87] Humphrey, Beyond, p. 39.

[88] Ibid.

The President's feelings about the adoption of the stronger civil rights plank were no doubt mixed. According to Humphrey, the tribute to the President was calculated to please him and win support of the moderates. All the good A.D.A. liberals claimed the President opposed the stronger plank because it was too radical. The Southerners thought Truman was determined to ram civil rights down their throats. A reporter asked Strom Thurmond as he led thirty-five southern delegates out of the convention on July 14, why he was taking such an extreme step. Said the reporter, "President Truman is only following the platform Roosevelt advocated." "I agree," Thurmond said, "but Truman means it."[89] Truman and his advisors felt the platform was fairly unimportant--they generally are. While it was no doubt gratifying to be praised, Truman also felt it was gratuitously aggravating to the South. As he told James Forrestal, he had not personally wanted to go as far as the Democratic platform had gone on civil rights. He also had no animus toward the southern delegates who had voted against the civil rights plank and against his nomination, "I would have done the same thing myself if I were in their place and came from their states."[90] Undoubtedly, Truman

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[89]Steinberg, The Man from Missouri, p. 315.

[90]James Forrestal, Diaries (New York: Viking Press, 1951), p. 458.

also knew there would be no civil rights if he did not get nominated and elected, and there was no point, in his estimation, in driving out a sizable segment of the Democratic Party.[91]

The convention dragged on to its end. Truman and Alben Barkley were finally nominated at 2 a.m., July 15. Both spent those long hours sitting backstage on folding chairs. Upon their appearance for their acceptance speeches, some theatrical soul had decided to release doves from a "monstrous floral Liberty Bell."[92] The hour was a good deal later than anticipated, however, and several doves passed away. No one wanted a dead pigeon as a party symbol, so hurried arrangements were made for the deceased. Finally, the surviving birds were released. Some flopped pitifully, while others strafed the audience, including Mrs. Truman.[93] "One perched on Sam Rayburn's head," said Truman. "Was Sam disgusted. Funniest thing in the convention."[94] Miraculously, the President had not lost his spirit or his

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[91]New Republic, July 26, pp. 10-11. It is interesting to speculate on whether Elsey, Clifford, Ewing, and Batt were in fact hoping to drive the more conservative racists out of the party. All four urged at various times that the South did not have to be placated.

[92]Ibid.

[93]Newsweek, July 26, 1948,

[94]Steinberg, Man from Missouri, p. 317.

sense of humor. He made a rousing speech, promising to call Congress back into session on July 26 to see if the Republicans meant all the things they had said in their platform. The convention responded enthusiastically, and at least ended on an optimistic note.

EPILOGUE

Having secured the nomination, President Truman used his executive powers to create a board to hear cases of discrimination in federal employment and declared a policy of equality of opportunity in the armed forces. A committee on equality of treatment and opportunity in the armed forces was established.[1] Typically, the President was criticized both for doing too much and not enough. His action was the first concrete step in ending racial discrimination in the federal government.

Politically, the Negro vote had an important place in Truman's plans for re-election. As Clifford had advised in November, 1947, Truman spoke out on civil rights. The Research Division produced a "File of Facts" which included the President's support of civil rights and listed eight Negroes the President had appointed to policy making positions.[2] In addition, a two-color comic book on Truman's life and civil rights support was printed and distributed in

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[1]Bernstein, The Ambiguous Legacy, p. 21.

[2]Papers of George Elsey, Speech File, 1948 Presidential campaign, Reference file 18, Civil Rights folder, File of the Facts.

the Negro wards.[3] Batt, writing to Clifford, urged that the President spend most of his time during the campaign in the seventeen states which went to one major party or the other by a very narrow margin in 1944. These were Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.[4] In these states the vote differential was 1.9% in 1944. Clifford forwarded this advice to the President on August 17.

Meanwhile, the second phase of the election strategy was being explored. Besides standing for civil rights, the President was also to assume a liberal stance in the midwest. Clifford had urged in the November, 1947 memo that the example of the elder Robert M. LaFollette should set the tone of the campaign. LaFollette had run ahead of Democratic candidate John W. Davis in 1924 by being more liberal than Calvin Coolidge, not by trying to be more conservative, as Davis had done. In the "File of Facts" were statistics to show how little the Republicans had done for the farmers. Almost accidentally the file contained the notation that the Republicans had voted not to spend money to

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[3]John P. Davis to David K. Niles, September 11, 1948, Files of Philleo Nash, Presidential Speeches and Messages, Box 29.

[4]Bill Batt to Clark Clifford, August 11, 1948, Papers of Clark Clifford, Political File, Box 20, p. 3.

build wheat storage bins. When Truman, on one of his train trips, arrived at a town where grain was stacked in the streets, he made a dramatic impact by citing exactly the reason for such waste.[5] He used this example to berate the Republicans for their "do-nothing Congress."

The election results bear witness to the soundness of the Clifford-Batt strategy. Truman lost only five western and midwestern states: Oregon, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas. In the East he lost only Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland. Only South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana voted for Thurmond. The total was 304 electoral votes to Dewey's 189, and Thurmond's 38. Wallace carried no state.[6] The defection of the Midwest was a real shock to the Republicans, and as Clifford and Elsey predicted, Truman did not lose very badly in the South. According to Walter White, he won his majority in Illinois, California, and Ohio by his heavy majorities in the Negro districts.

White reported to the President on November 30, 1948. According to statistics compiled by NAACP offices all over the country, Truman carried the Negro vote 3:1 nation-wide.

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[5]Memo to the President, August 17, 1948, 1948 campaign, ibid., Box 21.

[6]Patenaude, The Presidential Election of 1948, p. 133.

White claimed that the Negro vote provided the balance of power in Ohio, Illinois, and California. According to White, in Ohio the Negro districts of Akron and Cleveland gave Truman 65,000 more votes than Dewey, and he carried the state by 7,107. Truman received a 32,512-vote edge over Dewey in the Negro districts of California to take the state by a 70,000 vote majority. In Illinois, Truman carried Chicago by 128,541 to win the state by 33,612.[7] These three states also voted for the strong civil rights plank at the convention. The Negro vote had now become an important part of the Democratic coalition. Wallace did not even carry Harlem. Truman had given a speech there on October 29, and convinced the Negro of his sincerity.[8] While southern Democrats continued to hold power in Congress, at national party conventions they were to be outvoted and their racist view publicly repudiated. The moderates and A.D.A. liberals emerged as the dominant majority within the Democratic Party at convention time at least. Both extreme wings, racists and Wallacites, were defeated and the Democratic Party emerged as the party of the moderate reform.

Wallace had not carried the Negro vote as well as he had expected. He lost votes primarily because Negro leaders

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[7]New York Times, November 30, 1948, p. 21.

[8]Davis, "A Study of Federal Civil Rights," p. 129.

knew he could not win. Walter White was able to present Truman with an "IOU" in November, 1948, that he would not have had if the Negro had voted for Wallace en masse. He would have lost some influence in the Democratic Party. The communist influence in the P.C.A. damaged Wallace's reputation among the blacks. Also, Truman had a tangible record as chief executive and his own "sincerity" to run on. The Truman personality cannot be discounted as an important element in his victory.

Dewey campaigned as a young statesman far above mundane politics. The main theme in his campaign speech--he seemed to have only one--was "unity." According to an admittedly biased source, Kenneth Birkhead, the Dewey campaign reminded the press of feudal times; he would make formal appearances, utter a few profound comments, and withdraw. On the Truman train, the President would wander back to the press car, look over reporters' shoulders as they wrote, and even correct their copy.[9] The press liked Truman more than Dewey, but felt he could not win. William Batt, after all the campaign strategy he plotted, concluded:

> In the last analysis, that margin was probably provided by the personality of the two men and the fact that President Truman is just personally a more human and more attractive person, and in whom people had more confidence than they did in Dewey.[10]

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[9] Birkhead Interview, p. 27.

[10] Batt Interview, p. 20.

Though he tried to play the statesman's role, Dewey always gave the impression that he was a politician. But while Truman was constantly accused of playing politics, he showed indisputable qualities of statesmanship. There was no discernible hypocrisy or elitism in his makeup. If he said he believed in equal rights for all men because that is what the Constitution says, he meant just that. Perhaps Jack Redding summed up the interaction of idealism and politics as well as any commentator did:

> Politics, by definition, is the art of government. Too often this definition is lost sight of and the word used in an opprobrious sense. Harry S Truman was a politician but he never played "politics."
>
> Perhaps a better word for politics is leadership, for the best politicians are leaders. But to be successful, these leaders or politicians must have faith in the people, faith that the people, when they know the facts, will take the proper course of action.[11]

President Truman continued to support Negro rights in his second term. The armed forces were finally desegregated and the federal civil service ended discrimination. Primary advances were made through court action, however. Truman's more advanced legislative programs languished in Congress. The significance of the first term of his administration is the growing recognition of the Negro's voting strength and his demands. The President and the Democratic Party both became convinced of the righteousness of the Negro's cause,

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[11]Redding, Inside, p. 308.

and the political wisdom of trying to satisfy some of their demands.

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